

**The Woman Singer and her Song**  
**in French and German Prose Fiction (circa 1790-1848)**

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**To my mother, Irmgard Effertz (née Pelz),  
and to her mother, Gertrud Pelz (née Salewski),  
two exceptionally strong women.**

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## Conventions

In this thesis I have followed the guidelines laid down in the Modern Humanities Research Association style book.

The following principles apply to my treatment of primary texts.

Due to the comparative nature of this thesis, all quotations from primary texts are given in the original language.

In the case of lesser-known authors, especially those discussed in chapters 5 and 7, I have chosen to give slightly longer quotations as I felt it important to give the reader a taste of the author's writing style and tone, as well as samples of works that are not generally well-known.

Quotations are taken from the critical edition of the author's work. In the case of the lesser-known authors treated in chapter 7, I have chosen the edition(s) available to me, all of which are held at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

The full reference for each edition is given the first time the work is cited, together with the abbreviation that will be used thereafter. A special case applies to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose complete works are available in a number of critical editions. I have followed Germanist conventions by using the standard sigla outlined in the bibliography.



## Abbreviations used for journals throughout the thesis

<b><i>AFM</i></b>	<i>Archiv für Musikwissenschaft</i>
<b><i>AMU</i></b>	<i>Acta Musicologica</i>
<b><i>ALZ</i></b>	<i>Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung</i>
<b><i>AUK</i></b>	<i>Ästhetik und Kommunikation</i>
<b><i>AMZ</i></b>	<i>Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung</i>
<b><i>COJ</i></b>	<i>Cambridge Opera Journal</i>
<b><i>DAI</i></b>	<i>Dissertation Abstracts International</i>
<b><i>DEP</i></b>	<i>La Démocratie pacifique</i>
<b><i>DFS</i></b>	<i>Dalhousie French Studies</i>
<b><i>DVJ</i></b>	<i>Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift</i>
<b><i>ELI</i></b>	<i>L'Europe littéraire</i>
<b><i>FHS</i></b>	<i>French Historical Studies</i>
<b><i>FQR</i></b>	<i>The Foreign Quarterly Review</i>
<b><i>GJB</i></b>	<i>Goethe-Jahrbuch</i>
<b><i>GYB</i></b>	<i>Goethe-Yearbook</i>
<b><i>GLL</i></b>	<i>German Life and Letters</i>
<b><i>GRM</i></b>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift</i>
<b><i>GQU</i></b>	<i>German Quarterly</i>
<b><i>HJB</i></b>	<i>Heine-Jahrbuch</i>
<b><i>JDS</i></b>	<i>Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft</i>
<b><i>JGG</i></b>	<i>Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft</i>
<b><i>JIG</i></b>	<i>Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik</i>
<b><i>JRM</i></b>	<i>Journal of the Royal Musical Association</i>
<b><i>LAB</i></b>	<i>L'Année balzacienne</i>
<b><i>LFM</i></b>	<i>La France musicale</i>
<b><i>LLZ</i></b>	<i>Leipziger Literaturzeitung</i>
<b><i>MAL</i></b>	<i>Music and Letters</i>

<b><i>MDF</i></b>	<i>Mercure de France</i>
<b><i>MLN</i></b>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<b><i>MLR</i></b>	<i>The Modern Language Review</i>
<b><i>MUB</i></b>	<i>Musik und Bildung</i>
<b><i>NPH</i></b>	<i>Neophilologica: A Journal of Germanic and Romance Languages and Literature</i>
<b><i>PMLA</i></b>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<b><i>RCL</i></b>	<i>Revue critique des livres nouveaux</i>
<b><i>RDT</i></b>	<i>Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre</i>
<b><i>RGA</i></b>	<i>Revue Générale</i>
<b><i>RHL</i></b>	<i>Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France</i>
<b><i>RLC</i></b>	<i>Revue de littérature comparée</i>
<b><i>RLV</i></b>	<i>Revue des langues vivantes</i>
<b><i>RDM</i></b>	<i>Revue des Deux Mondes</i>
<b><i>RDP</i></b>	<i>Revue de Paris</i>
<b><i>RGM</i></b>	<i>Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris</i>
<b><i>RMU</i></b>	<i>Revue de Musicologie</i>
<b><i>ROF</i></b>	<i>Romanistische Forschungen</i>
<b><i>RSH</i></b>	<i>Revue des Sciences Humaines</i>
<b><i>RUO</i></b>	<i>Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa</i>
<b><i>VST</i></b>	<i>Victorian Studies</i>
<b><i>WFS</i></b>	<i>Women in French Studies</i>



## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the woman singer and her song as a literary motif in French and German prose fiction between 1790 and 1848. In the form of selected case studies, I establish how, for some authors of this period, the singer constituted an important cipher for female artistic empowerment. Although substantial research on the cross-fertilization between music and literature exists, this specific motif has so far received very little attention in Comparative Literature studies. Additionally, literary critics have not previously explored the potential of the woman singer beyond the stereotypes associated with woman and song. By outlining the socio-cultural background of singers at the time in chapter 2, and the theoretical context of idealized female song in chapter 3, I first show the strong ideological dimension of the singer as a character of ambivalence. I then investigate how literature responded to this theme, and how key authors developed the character as a reflection on aesthetic ideals pertaining to female musicality, and as a potentially subversive, empowered figure of female song performance. In chapter 4 I examine the importance of early singer archetypes created by Goethe and Madame de Staël, both of whose visions of musically inspired artistic genius paved the way for subsequent literary treatments of the singer and her increasing professionalism and artistic agency. In Chapter 5 I show to what extent marginalized authors like Caroline Fischer wrote explicitly against the cliché of the musical feminine ideal, proposing different views on female agency through art, whereas in chapter 7 I demonstrate how women authors of the July Monarchy period, such as Taunay, Sand, Ulliac and Desbordes-Valmore, wrote strong narratives revolving around the life and genius of the prima donna singer. On the other hand, in chapter 6 I show that, although couching their narratives in seemingly more traditional, patriarchal imagery, male authors like Hoffmann, Balzac and Berlioz implicitly criticized the idealism associated with both music and woman and looked for narrative ways to portray the woman singer as an artist who maintains autonomy and integrity. My conclusion emphasizes that through their unique treatment of the woman singer, authors contributed to a complex, continuous discourse on woman and music which went beyond the stereotypical nature of cultural and aesthetic paradigms of female song.

## Introduction

Woman and song. If we look at European culture, it may seem that these two have always enjoyed a privileged rapport and that women have sung since the very beginning. Strong images of female song go back all the way to Greco-Roman antiquity where it is said that it was a female singing voice that first related the origin of the world: The Muses as literally the first singers have traditionally been considered the guardians and teachers of the arts. If Orpheus became the first male singer-poet of European culture (and the subject of the first operas to emerge in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italy), he owed his musical gift to the teachings of his mother, the muse Calliope.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the Muses also remained archetypes of artistic inspiration for generations of poets, musicians and painters. It is their art, the 'art of the Muses' that we know today as 'music'. Throughout the centuries, the mythical union of woman and song loses nothing of its original fascination, as music itself became allegorized through the female traits of *Musica* and the patron saint of sacred music, Saint Cecilia. European culture boasts a number of fascinating, if not to say extravagant, figures of female song, starting with the image of the poet-singer Sappho, or the rather disturbing accounts of the sirens. Interestingly, these two strong images of female song are also representative of what has to this day remained a perceived threat of female musicality. Since the beginnings of musical culture, critics advocated the 'proper' performance and called for regulations to keep music in check, since it was considered a powerful art form capable of arousing passion and immorality.<sup>2</sup> As the polar opposite to the idealised poet-singer Orpheus, the siren came to represent the archetypal imagery of female song as a threat to society.<sup>3</sup> As such, the siren has remained firmly anchored as representation of the ambivalence

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<sup>1</sup> See Charles Segal, *Orpheus. The Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989); see also Alexandre Auguste Hirsch's painting *Calliope enseigne la musique au jeune Orphée*, 1869. Périgueux; Musée du Périgord.

<sup>2</sup> 'Use not much the company of a woman that is a singer, lest thou be taken with her attempts' (Ecclesiasticus, 9.4). See also Plato's *Protagoras* (347d, p.48), and his *Republic*, in which he allows only certain modes and rhythms that do not indulge one's emotions (*Republic*, 398c-400c, pp.95-98).

<sup>3</sup> On the siren topic, see for instance *Sehnsucht und Sirene: Vierzehn Abhandlungen zu Wasserphantasien*, ed. Irmgard Roebeling (Pfaffenweiler: Centauras, 1992). This compilation contains an excellent study on the siren as a cipher for otherness (Ute Guzzoni, 'Die Ausgrenzung des Anderen', pp.5-34).



that has always surrounded the singer herself, playing with the uncanny of both music and womanhood: half-woman, half-animal, the siren sang to draw men into her deadly embrace, thus reuniting the utmost rapture associated with her singing voice with certain death for those who did not plug their ears in time, as the *Odyssey* aptly tells us. Since antiquity, and through the help of such powerful imagery, the beauty of song, and in extension of music, has always been linked to its underlying threat, to the death that awaits the listener should he follow the singing voice. Just as the Muses have nurtured the imagery of the saintly, innocent singer who, for instance in the shape of a harp girl, acts as a soothing, inspiring, loving force on the male listener, so the Sirens have nurtured the antagonistic side of female song, and continued to underpin the imagery of the woman singer as a siren singer, a *femme fatale* whose song and performance could be deadly for a male listener. As a myth, female song appears characteristically big in its socio-cultural imagery and symbolical charge, while at the same time remaining mysterious and relatively little explored in terms of a female music history. The myth of female song as a dangerous song, as 'the siren's song', persevered in European culture, be it in the Pauline injunction reiterated by the church until well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup> or in such powerful literary figures as the French Mélusine, Paracelsus' Undines and the water nymphs and nixies that populate Germanic folklore, all of whom possess the most enchanting voice yet, alas, no human soul unless by marriage to a mortal man.

One particularly rich and enticing variation of female song myth revolved around the late 18<sup>th</sup>- and especially 19<sup>th</sup>-century figure of the professional singer and operatic diva who, perpetuating the myth of female song into modernity, was like few other female artists able to entice audiences and appear as the quintessential embodiment of woman and song in all their ambiguity, capable of appearing as either a saintly muse to her male admirer, or a *femme fatale* who causes the male listener's downfall. An overview of female music history reveals the ambivalence that especially women encountered in the area of music, itself deemed a realm of

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<sup>4</sup> In the interpretation of St. Paul's remark '*Mulier in ecclesia taceat*' (I Corinthians 14.34), women singers had been excluded from churches, and from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards banned from theatres. See Franz Haböck, *Die Kastraten und ihre Gesangkunst: eine gesangsphysiologische, kultur- und musikhistorische Studie* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1927), pp.221-24.

potential worry, and the unique mixture of myth and reality that seems to accompany any account of female artistry.

It is this fascinating combination of woman and song, at the crossroads of myth and reality, of music, culture and literature, that lies at the heart of this thesis and invites a thorough investigation of the image and representation of the singer and her song in the transitional period of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century in France and Germany. A study of the woman singer and her song in prose fiction could certainly be undertaken for a different era, as well as in a different national and linguistic context. Yet the particular importance of French and German aesthetics between the two Revolutions, and at the core of European Romanticism, as well as the rich cross-fertilization between music and literature, and between Germany and France at the time makes this specific focus on the motif of the singer and her song especially worthwhile. Moreover, this area of Comparative Literary Studies so far appears under-researched: Existing studies on either Romantic literature or a topic related to the myth and imagery of the singer appear biased in that they tend to simply focus on the mythological, stereotypical dimension of singer and song, dealing for instance with the motif of woman and water in German Romanticism, or the prima donna figure in French Romantic texts.<sup>5</sup> Such studies are limited to the 'myth' of woman embodied by one-dimensional figures of female song, yet they fail to address the complexity of female song as a socio-cultural reality and an important, musical-literary and aesthetic concept, and to investigate the potential for female empowerment through the use of the singer figure in literature.

To date, studies have focussed on well-established works of the literary canon, as well as traditional binary readings of 19<sup>th</sup>-century female representation in literature accentuating the rigidity and passivity of female 'types' in novels, like the siren-woman or the tender muse-girl. In the light of modern literary scholarship, and especially with the additional angles of gender studies and comparative literature, I do not believe that a multi-faceted musical and female character, carrier of a rather complex musical-literary discourse, can be read along such simplistic, iconographical lines: At a time when fascinating, if controversial art concepts

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<sup>5</sup> Marie-Josée Victoria, *La Cantatrice dans la littérature romantique française* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Lyon, 1996). This constitutes the only detailed study dealing specifically with the singer. There exists no comparable study in the German realm.



emerge in both countries, 'song' becomes a poetic ideal while women establish themselves increasingly as professional artists and partake in the musical-literary discourse as writers and intellectuals. In consequence, the woman singer, in all her different variations, appears as a multi-layered literary myth of both woman and music, a representative of female musicality and musical aesthetics, yet as we will see, also a very pertinent comment on the part of the authors who wrote her, on the well-established dichotomy of female ideal and performance, and the sublimity of music.

The aim of my thesis is to investigate female song and its performer as a motif in selected prose works of the period and to offer a fresh, critical reading of this motif beyond the simplification of certain 'types' that have so far been at the centre of attention in literary criticism. I envisage providing a much-needed contribution to the area of comparative literature dealing with the rapport between literature and music, as well as offering a new take on the singer as a significant figure of female literary representation.

What makes this topic so fascinating is not only the breadth of texts dealing with the singer, but the general output and degree of preoccupation that we encounter on the part of writers to engage with music in their writing and to express this through a motif such as the singer. As part of a wider poetical-literary discourse, music became a prominent linguistic, cultural, theoretical and philosophical reference for literature, manifesting itself in the form of (among others) theoretical treatises on the nature of music and its relationship with language, poems composed in homage to famous singers, or prose texts which treated the ideal that represented music in their own way and aimed to poeticize it through their staging of musical plots and characters. While the literary scene discovered music and musicians, the opposite was also true, since composers chose to set poems, plays and other literary texts to music, often creating a role with a specific singer in mind. The intimate, reciprocally fruitful link of these two prominent areas of 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture is also accounted for through contemporary iconography, for example through the archetypal

depiction of the ‘Lady with the Lyre’,<sup>6</sup> of the mermaid, the girl singing and playing her harp as well as the countless pictorial comments on contemporary musical culture, salon recitals or prima donna caricatures. However, in contrast to the iconographical dimension of the singer, literature treats the motif in a subtler manner.

Some of the most fascinating singers were created by French and German writers from the 1770s onwards. One only has to think of Goethe’s enigmatic Mignon, whose nostalgic Italy song became known throughout Europe, as did the figure of the child-singer and social outcast, exotic, musical genius,<sup>7</sup> a stranger to society like many of her singing sisters in real life. George Sand is but one of many writers to celebrate the singer in 1840s France and create her monumental epos *Consuelo* in homage to the outstanding artist Pauline Viardot. In between these two big names of the French and German canon, we encounter a considerable number of different literary treatments of the woman singer that span most areas of the aesthetic discourse, from sublime to trivial, from prose to poetry to journalism – some of whom constitute the selected case studies of this thesis. Due to the vast nature of the topic itself (and bearing in mind its interdisciplinary character with regard to music, comparative literature, cultural and gender studies) as well as to the constraints of the thesis, I have selected texts that I believe significantly develop the singer motif against the backdrop of contemporary aesthetics, and illustrate the complexity, breadth and evolution of the singer figure.

To begin with, in order to situate the singer as a literary motif within its socio-cultural and aesthetic context, I will briefly outline key aspects of musical culture relevant to the period in question in chapter 2, and then contextualize the singer and her song within the predominant musical-literary discourse of the time in chapter 3. The case studies I shall then deal with open with the iconic singer archetypes Mignon and Corinne, whom I discuss in chapter 4, and, in chapter 5, the lesser-known treatment of female song by Caroline Auguste Fischer who, as early as the 1800s, offers a very critical position on the topic. Chapter 6 and 7 discuss the

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<sup>6</sup> See Margaret Waller, ‘The Melancholy Man and the Lady with the Lyre: The Sexual Politics of Genius in Early Romantic Fiction and Painting’, in *Correspondances: Studies in Literature, History and the Arts in 19th century France*, ed. Keith Busby (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 223-37.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the term ‘genius’ in connection with the woman singer, see pp.63-67.



significant contributions to the musical-literary discourse made by Hoffmann, Balzac and Berlioz, and the richness of the literary output by July Monarchy authors such as George Sand and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore.

With regard to comparative literature, an important underpinning of my thesis is the richness and strength of Franco-German literary relations at the time, with some important links, yet also substantial differences to be discussed in the treatment of the singer motif in both national contexts. Additionally, the history of the motif is one of a consistent, ongoing cultural and musical-literary discourse, with some authors, both in France and Germany, explicitly or implicitly referring to preceding writers and texts. This is relevant, for instance, if we look at Balzac's appreciation of both Goethe and Hoffmann, and his musical-literary response in the wake of the reception of Hoffmann in France. However, the majority of texts refer rather to a common cultural and literary image, established through preceding texts, through the myth of song and singer and literary archetypes like Mignon or Corinne. Yet this more or less implicit intertextual affinity is not what makes the individual text stand out, but rather it serves to underpin the evolution from early models of female song in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the overwhelming presence of the opera singer in narratives of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise, not all texts discussed in this thesis are firmly established in their literary canons. Rather, the range of texts chosen for this study reflects the breadth and diversity of the musical-literary discourse which embraced the elitist tendencies of music and literature at the time just as much as their popular, trivial side. Some texts were immensely popular at the time of their publication but are nowadays largely forgotten, others are slowly being rediscovered by scholars, and subsequently re-assessed as important contributions to the cultural discourse of the time and as fascinating testimonies of the omnipresent imagery of music in literature. The varying quality and assessment of the singer's literary output, it seems, reflects the ambiguous, complex status of the singer herself, between the 'high' ideals of woman and song and the popular, mundane allure of the stage entertainer, between the margins and the centre of society.

As a true socio-cultural myth of her time, the woman singer nevertheless appears, upon closer inspection, as a complex reflection and negotiation of diverging musical-literary aesthetics and art practices, from the intimacy of the salon to the

spotlight of the opera stage, from the ideals of song as poetry to the mundanity of operetta songs and street performers, from the struggles of the woman music teacher to the acclaim of the celebrated opera diva. All of these aspects offer us glimpses of what the woman singer and her song imply during the period of the 1780s to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Existing Scholarship

Despite the fact that the singer appears as an iconic figure especially of 19<sup>th</sup>-century musical culture, few studies deal specifically with this motif. Some substantial research exists in the broader areas of comparative literature, musicology and gender studies, which serves as a sensible starting point for any serious research on musical-literary aesthetics, and a musical-literary figure like the singer. Substantial work has been produced in France and Germany in the area of 'music and literature' and it has shown the intensity of the musical-literary discourse towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>8</sup> further illustrated by specific genres like the artist novel, or literary archetypes like the painter, poet, and musician.

A more recent area of research, feminist musicology has produced some important studies aiming to rebalance the perceived bias in European music history, from which women have been excluded for so long.<sup>9</sup> While it is true that European

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<sup>8</sup> Standard works include Béatrice Didier, *La Musique des Lumières* (Paris: PUF, 1985); *ibid.*, 'Le Mythe musical dans le texte littéraire des Lumières au Romantisme: du mythe de la musique au mythe du musicien', in *Le Mythe en littérature: essais offerts à Pierre Brunel à l'occasion de son sixième anniversaire* (Paris: PUF, 2000), pp.81-94; Francis Claudon, *La Musique des romantiques* (Paris: PUF, 1992); Jean-Louis Backès, *Musique et littérature. Essai de poétique comparée* (Paris: PUF, 1994); Michel Delon, 'La Musique dans le roman, de *La Nouvelle Héloïse* à *Corinne*', in *L'Art du roman. L'art dans le roman*, ed. Thomas Hunkeler / Sylvie Jeanneret / Martin Rizek (Bern: Lang, 2000), pp.23-36; Christine Lubkoll, *Mythos Musik. Poetische Entwürfe des Musikalischen in der Literatur um 1800* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1995); Corinna Caduff, *Die Literarisierung von Musik und bildender Kunst um 1800* (München: Fink, 2003); *Music and Literature in German Romanticism*, ed. Siobhán Donovan / Robin Elliott (Rochester: Camden House, 2004); Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Steven Paul Scher, *Literatur und Musik* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Judith Tick, 'Women in Music', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, pp. 519-37; *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, ed. Jane Bowers/Judith Tick (Urbana/Chicago: UIP, 1986); Kimberly Marshall, *Rediscovering the Muses: Women's Musical Traditions* (Boston: NUP, 1993); Carol Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music: an Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: NUP, 1996); Karin Pendle, *Women and*



musical culture has always been male-dominated, recent scholarship has aimed to unearth the history and works of educated women musicians, such as the female troubadours, wandering minstrels, nuns or women composers. Most of these studies conclude that music history should gradually be re-written in order to acknowledge the contributions made by women musicians and to canonize more female-authored works. Some of these (often pioneering) studies have offered me a valuable insight into female performance realities, as well as the close bond between music, literature and culture,<sup>10</sup> and helped me anchor the literary and cultural fantasy of music and the singer on firm ground. More general historical scholarship equally provided important background reading to put the musical-literary 'ferment', in which the singer evolved, on the map.<sup>11</sup> Equally within the range of historical scholarship, studies of selected women singers throughout history have added to my understanding of the realistic implications of this figure.<sup>12</sup> Scholarship treating the woman singer specifically is an interesting issue: as I have explained above, few studies treat the motif explicitly. However, a number of works to date have

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*Music. A History*. (Bloomington: IUP, 2001); Eva Rieger, *Frau und Musik* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1980); *ibid.*, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft* (Kassel: Furore-Verlag, 1988); Ruth Solie, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: UCP, 1993); *ibid.*, *Music in Other Words. Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: UCP, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Joseph-Marc Bailbé, *Le Roman et la musique en France sous la monarchie de juillet* (Paris: Minard, 1969); Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius. Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Women's Press, 1989); Corinna Caduff / Siegrid Weigel, *Das Geschlecht der Künste* (Köln: Böhlau, 1996); Freia Hoffmann, *Instrument und Körper. Die musizierende Frau in der bürgerlichen Kultur* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1992); Hoffmann, 'Institutionelle Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten für Musikerinnen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Von der Spielfrau zur Performance-Künstlerin. Auf der Suche nach einer Musikgeschichte der Frauen*, ed. Freia Hoffmann / Eva Rieger (Kassel: Furore, 1993), pp.77-91; Jean Mongrédien, *La Musique en France, des Lumières au Romantisme, 1789-1830* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986); Siegrid Nieberle, *Frauenmusikliteratur. Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999); Nancy Reich, 'Women as Musicians: A Question of Class', in *Musicology and Difference*, pp.125-46; Julie Anne Sadie, 'Musiciennes of the Ancien Régime', in *Women Making Music*, pp.191-223; Bonnie Anderson/Judith Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present* (London: Penguin, 1988); Georges Duby/Michelle Perrot, *Histoire des femmes en Occident. Tome IV. Le XIXe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Bloom/Jacques Barzun, *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties: La Musique à Paris dans les années mil huit cent trente* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1987); David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770-1840* (Berkeley: UCP, 2002); David Tunley, *Music in the 19th-Century Parisian Salon* (Armidale, N.S.W.: University of New England, Armidale, 1997); *ibid.*, *Salons, Singers and Songs: a Background to Romantic French Song 1830-70* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Biographically-angled studies include: Rupert Christiansen, *Prima Donna: A History* (London: Bodley Head, 1995); Isabelle Putnam Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers* (Greenwood, 2005); Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006).



approached the topic of the female voice in general, often based on psychoanalytical and postmodern feminist criticism.<sup>13</sup> While these studies, and their theoretical underpinnings are not essential to my thesis, they have offered me important basic reading on the complexity of the female voice as a paradigm in European culture.

This brief overview shows that the basic scholarship is certainly in place in order to facilitate research into the motif of the singer and her song not only as a literary motif, but also as a strong cipher of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural and aesthetic discourse. However, the woman singer, and with her a significant part of both female music history and the musical-literary discourse still remains to a large extent unexplored, confined to the realm of literary myths, where she, doubtlessly, earned her place. However, in this thesis, I aim to offer a first substantial reading of the motif, in its complexity and controversy.

## Methodology

The present thesis constitutes a comparativist study of the singer and her song as a crucial motif in late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature. As such, the reading I propose in the form of selected key studies of texts published between 1795 and 1844, is indebted to the breadth that comparative literature studies are able to offer and ties the disciplines of literature, musicology and gender studies together in order to discuss the singer in her aesthetic and socio-cultural dimension. Deeply entrenched in and contributing to contemporary, constantly evolving musical-literary aesthetics, the singer constitutes an important vehicle of thought transfer and intertextuality between France and Germany. As I proceed in my selected case studies, I will carefully discuss each text in terms of its textual, aesthetic and socio-cultural implications, while bearing in mind the importance of French-German literary relations, as well as the continuity of the motif of the singer who, as a female artist,

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<sup>13</sup> See especially Leslie Dunn/Nancy Jones, *Embodied Voices. Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994); Felicia Miller Frank, *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice, and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Stanford: SUP, 1995); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: IUP, 1988).

left such a deep imprint on 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture. In order to be fully understood, the singer needs to be situated within the cultural and literary tradition as well as within a history of motifs of preceding and subsequent models of female song. A complete picture of what the singer motif implies can only be obtained if we consider the bigger picture of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought, which stems from Rousseauesque song aesthetics to early archetypes like Goethe's Mignon and Staël's Corinne, and further on to the singer apotheosis of the 1840s. Such a comparativist, diachronic discussion indicates moreover that 'Romanticism' in its complexity calls for a continuous debate on motifs and forms, and a serious questioning of traditional readings of female representation in Romantic discourse.

### The Question of Otherness

What is extremely striking when looking at literary representations of female song is the perceived stigma of *otherness*, which was brought forward by 20<sup>th</sup>-century feminist scholarship discussing women's place in western society and coining the term of the other, the 'second' sex.<sup>14</sup> Writing about the singer and her song in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seems to address two key aspects of otherness that particularly nurture literary expression in this period: firstly, the problem of 'writing music' in literature, which refers to the fact that music was considered an artistic ideal as well as an idealised form of human expression, that inevitably changes when transcribed into writing and which thus came to be seen as an instance of 'difference' in a narrative context. The appropriation of music by literature entails the transposition of sound onto the page, of the sensual experience between singer and audience to its abstraction at the hands of the author who transcribes the musical experience into written text. In the triangle of voice, body and text, 'la voix est, par rapport au silence, comme l'écriture (au sens graphique) sur le papier blanc. [...] Corporéité du parler, la voix se situe à

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<sup>14</sup> Most prominently by Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* (1949). The concept of *otherness* has also found resonance in the Social Sciences, usually subsumed by the term *Alterity*. In order to avoid confusion, I shall use the less marked term of *otherness*, which I consider more appropriate for the cultural and literary nature of my study.



l'articulation du corps et du discours.'<sup>15</sup> It is in this textual transposition of the sung voice onto paper, from singer to listener to author, that a first dimension of 'difference' of the singing voice, and its performer, occurs. Some 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars have hinted at the hybridity of literary genres around 1800, and the place which song or other non-prosaic elements occupy as different poetic and communicative modes within a text.<sup>16</sup> To what extent these early lyrical narratives paved the way for more well-known 19<sup>th</sup>-century forms such as the *poème en prose*, still requires thorough investigation.<sup>17</sup> Although the aforementioned studies do acknowledge the textual dimension of 'musical otherness' and the issue of trying to express music through prose, they do not address the question of 'gendered otherness' or performance (of song, singer and author), that is the issue of the woman singer as a representative of female and musical otherness, and of the singing body as a mark of difference and loss:

La voix humaine est en effet le lieu privilégié (eidétique) de la différence: un lieu qui échappe à toute science, car il n'est aucune science (physiologie, histoire, esthétique, psychanalyse) qui épuise la voix: classez, commentez historiquement, sociologiquement, esthétiquement, techniquement la musique, il y aura toujours un reste, un supplément, un lapsus, un non-dit qui se désigne lui-même: la voix.<sup>18</sup>

For this study, I consider it important to ground my investigation in this fundamental topos of 'ineffable' female and musical otherness, which none of the abovementioned studies take into consideration, and which takes me to the second implication of the woman singer as a figure of *otherness*. Feminist scholarship, and studies that do not have a gender-studies related approach, point out that the musical-literary discourse of the 1800s blended music and femininity together as

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<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques III, l'obvie et l'obtus* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), pp.225 f. Roger Kempf remarks that 'Livres et corps, tout est texte d'égale dignité. Tout parle ou se parle, s'écrit, se lit' (*Sur le corps romanesque*, (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p.7).

<sup>16</sup> John Bayley, *The Romantic Survival. A Study in Poetic Evolution* (London: Constable, 1957); Paul Neuburger, *Die Verseinlage in der Prosadichtung der Romantik* (Leipzig: Mayer und Müller, 1924); Martina Kieß, *Poesie und Prosa. Die Lieder in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren* (Frankfurt/Main: Athenaeum, 1987); Ingrid Winter, *Wiederholte Spiegelungen. Funktion und Bedeutung der Verseinlage in Goethes Iphigenie auf Tauris und Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Bern: Lang, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> *La Poésie en Prose. Des Lumières au Romantisme, 1760-1820* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, p.247.



belonging to the same imagery of the *Other* for which man felt a nostalgic longing yet which he could hardly access, let alone understand.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, 'otherness' occurs in the literary conceptualisation of femininity and the subsequent representation of women in narrative texts. Women were, biologically and socio-culturally, considered different from men; as the 'other' (of men), they were subject to socio-cultural expectations as well as to idealised concepts of femininity. A number of literary depictions of women during the time clearly followed the paradigm of idealised femininity, examples of which would be the muse figures encountered in certain texts, or the images of 'traditional' femininity, such as the dutiful wife and mother, or the well-bred salon girl who innocently performs a pleasant tune for a charmed audience.

As I will demonstrate in chapters 2 and 3, there existed a powerful, crucial link between music as an 'ideal' art and form of human expression on the one side, and woman as an 'idealised' creature complementary to man, on the other – both implied idealised versions of what they actually represented in reality and, as such, also gave rise to more controversial treatments of women singers against the 'idealised' imagery of the time. Both women and music were conceptualised as 'ideals' and as 'the other' from a male point of view, and grounded on the aforementioned long-standing tradition of the close connection between woman and song.

As I will show in chapter 2, which deals with the socio-cultural context of the woman singer, the 'ideal' woman of the time covered by my literary case studies had to conform to a number of social and cultural norms – such as motherhood, musical dilettantism and her status as a complementary force and helper to her (artist) husband. Likewise, the 'ideal' woman singer, as I illustrate in chapter 3, conformed to certain (male) expectations of female musicality, which appear, contrary to the ideals pertaining to women, slightly more blurred. The 'ideal' singer should give the illusion of an 'untrained' voice and convey, through her song and 'ideal' state of being: emotive, pre-rational and pre-linguistic – attributes already associated with female nature and diametrically opposed to male nature and to the realm of reason, culture and the spoken (or written) word.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Music is gendered feminine, that is, because of its difference. And, like woman and other Others, music finds itself freely metaphorized' (Solie, *Musicology and Difference*, p.14).

However, as we will see in chapter 3, the ‘ideal’ singer was, male expectations on her notwithstanding, equally a vessel for and performer of music as an ‘ideal’ art form, meaning of music as a higher form of human expression and as a sign of utmost artistic skill and genius, which could result in the controversial image of the woman singer as an ‘idealised’ woman who had to answer to socio-cultural expectations, as well as an ‘idealised’ musician who had to do justice to such high, ‘inhuman’ categories as artistic genius and sublimity, which de facto placed her outside the norms that normally applied to women. It is the controversy of these different ideals pertaining to women and music, and the writing of female song as a negotiation of such different ideals, and in fact of the woman singer as ‘different’ (as a woman and as an artist) which underpins the present study.<sup>20</sup>

Music, especially the fantasy of female song, emerges as a strong antagonist to literature and speech, even more so if we take into account the increasingly important concept of absolute music, voiced (though in different terms) by authors important to this study, such as Goethe, Madame de Staël, E. T. A. Hoffmann as well as other French and German Romantics.<sup>21</sup> If music is considered a higher, sublime realm of human expression, the dichotomy of song and spoken word accounts for a fascinating, if problematic combination within the text, a combination that further invites a study of musical difference and possible conflict of music and words in the written text.<sup>22</sup> In patriarchal culture, both women and music are marked as dichotomous from and complementary to men, as well as to literature and the written word, whereas music is defined by its freedom. ‘The everyday terms we [sic] use for human subjectivity (one, he, everyone, mankind) make universal claims but are nonetheless situated as male within cultural practice.’<sup>23</sup> The issue of gendered difference, in Solie’s words, is that of power, but assuming one’s difference, dealing with it in an assertive way, may represent an undermining of existing hierarchies of power, in addition to an affirmation of one’s own identity, creativity and power. The woman singer appears to be a pertinent case for discussing the issue of

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<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed discussion of ‘ideal’ femininity and ‘ideal’ female song, see chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>21</sup> See p.47; and Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> See also Rieger’s discussion of ‘absolute music’ as a male preserve (*Frau und Musik*, pp.16-17)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., *Musicology and Difference*, p.1.



empowerment within the constraints and the liberties implied by musical-feminine otherness.

I shall ground the textual analysis of my case studies of the woman singer and her song in this key motif of double otherness, that is of both a 'writing' of (female) music in prose texts and of the narrative treatment of the woman singer as an unconventional, 'different' and possibly polemic embodiment of music and femininity, written both in concordance with and against the ideals of woman and music that I briefly pointed out above. The writing of female song in literature may thus express the conflict, but also the potential implied by the writing of a female, musical character who is appears as 'the other', antagonistic to men but also to more traditional types of womanhood. Investigating the narrative embodiment of female song, I shall discuss to what extent the woman singer may be considered a motif of narrative, aesthetic and gendered otherness, and how this narrative treatment of the singer relates to the socio-historical and aesthetic context introduced in chapters 2 and 3.

Between the singer's song and her silence, I aim to discuss to what extent the musical feminine can be regarded as an area of dispute, as is argued by feminist critic Anna-Maria Stuby, who, through her standard work on the siren myth, identifies the central antagonism of western culture as the dichotomy between male and female, text and music, culture and nature,<sup>24</sup> or as a potential for a female narrative discourse of empowerment.

### **Performance, Subversion and the Possibility of Female Agency**

This leads me to the second important theoretical grounding of my study, which draws on the understanding that writing the singer and her song may well imply a writing of difference, yet at the same time, this difference suggests a degree of hybridity and openness, if not subversion and liberation. In contrast to most 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship, which reads the woman artist as a fixed stereotype along clearly

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<sup>24</sup> Anna-Maria Stuby, 'Sirenen und ihre Gesänge. Variationen über das Motiv des Textraubs', in *Frauen: Erfahrungen, Mythen, Projekte*, ed. Anna-Maria Stuby (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1985).

defined lines of aesthetics and gender, such as the female muse or the *femme fatale*-type of singer who threatens the male order, I aim to discuss the singer as an ongoing negotiation of different views which take into account the complexity of the singer as a subversive character as well as the act of writing as a performative, continuous discourse. Recent (feminist) criticism argues that what we perceive to be stable, ontological categories of gender are in fact continuous gender performances, constructed and re-enacted,<sup>25</sup> which create the illusion of ontological gender categories. The singer herself is not a fixed literary motif, she appears as a subject of continuous debate in the literary discourse and is marked by her hybridity as well as her potential for subversion of traditional gender stereotypes as part of an ongoing, literary discourse. As a literary motif, the singer is not just a textual cipher or a literary representation of a specific type of female music, but she constitutes a possible female musical performance, as authors 'perform' the singer and her song through their writing. While my thesis is a comparativist work not exclusively focused on feminist criticism, I am aware of the importance of questioning traditional notions of gender and find that approaching the literary motif, and thus literary discourse, as possible 'gender performance' may offer a useful starting point to break away from traditional binary readings of literary texts, if we understand each author's contribution as an ongoing, discursive negotiation of the singer as a female and musical ideal.<sup>26</sup>

The singer as she appears in the different case studies is both a rewriting of contemporary aesthetics and ideals regarding female musicality, and a possible performance of criticism towards such stereotypes. If authors draw on the reality within which they write, they also possess a freedom in the way they reflect on this reality. Their own performance suggests an ongoing discourse on and negotiation of seemingly binary stereotypes, with the potential for a more complex, liberal and subversive treatment of the woman singer. As a fictionalised account of cultural paradigms, literature is a two-fold process and in consequence, the study of the woman singer and female song must encompass both the purely textual level of literary analysis and the realm of *performance* in every sense of the word. Literary

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<sup>25</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Thinking Gender* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> See pp.10-11, and chapters 2 and 3.



texts are not isolated but reflecting upon and rewriting the socio-cultural discourse from which they develop (the 'performance' that Judith Butler refers to).

As such, I consider it the privilege of literature as a continuous, fluid discourse, both to give cultural paradigms a different, aesthetic depth, and at the same time to negotiate diverging, sometimes conflicting viewpoints of the time, such as musical aesthetics, the singer as a musical genius or the issue of the performing woman.

Under the surface of a seemingly coherent, binary, patriarchal Romantic discourse, I will show how views on women and art were at least diverging, if not contradictory, and that the so-called 'Romantic discourse' can best be assessed if we study each author individually, in their own right and with regard to the specific cultural and aesthetic context of their writing. This becomes especially important since I compare female and male authors, who still occupy different places within literary history and aesthetics:

We can only reinstate women creators in cultural history when we pay them the compliment of treating their works with the care and respect that we accord to the individuality of (white) males. And we cannot do this if we negate the fact that they were writing as women who emerge from a female situation (which needs to be explicated), and who fit into the patterns of patrilineal and matrilineal continuity (whose links have to be exposed).<sup>27</sup>

As an icon of female professionalism and of musical-literary aesthetics, the singer seems to be a relatively accessible motif for both male and female authors to use, but for the latter perhaps even more so. The character bridges real-life artistry, representing one of the likely possibilities for figures of female artistic empowerment, which may seem an obvious choice for women authors in order to discuss issues of female education, empowerment, artistic creativity and professionalism. This of course may be true for male authors as well and I would disagree with feminist critics who argue that the female writing tradition must be segregated from male traditions since women's texts 'explore what it means for a woman to "have a voice". Voice thus becomes a metaphor of and vehicle for female empowerment both on stage and off.'<sup>28</sup> While this may be true to a certain extent, I do not exclude the possibility of male authors representing empowered female

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<sup>27</sup> Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, p.231.

<sup>28</sup> Leonardi/Pope, p.18.

voices through their singers, just as women authors may reproduce male-authored stereotypes of the singer as a passive muse or a stylized angel, or quite simply a dilettantish songbird. Although the socio-cultural discourse of the period in question is patriarchal in tone, and an appropriation of femininity for the sake of male artistic (pro-)creation does occur, it would be wrong to assume that there are only two types of singers, depending on whether they were written by men or women. In fact, just as the context I have discussed so far is heteroclit, so the singer may be a motif not of a gender dichotomy but rather of a gender dialectics,<sup>29</sup> to which both male and female authors contribute equally.

Writing the woman singer constitutes both representation and performance through which authors negotiate certain stereotypes while inscribing their own performance of the motif and aesthetics into an ongoing discourse. Writing the singer and her song is not per se a predetermined act. Thus, in my case studies, I aim to demonstrate the diversity of authors' voices in the literary representation of the singer, by discussing the potential of the motif and its possible subversion of aesthetic stereotypes. Beyond the constraints that terms relating to aesthetic periods such as Romanticism or *Empfindsamkeit* impose, I will discuss each author's textual embodiment of the singer and discuss their aesthetics relating to the motif in the continuity of what I consider to be a fascinating *Motivgeschichte* of the singer. In doing so, I propose one possible evolution of the singer motif, between France and Germany, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Before proceeding to the selected case studies, I shall now further investigate the motif of female song in its aesthetic and pragmatic dimension. Writing about music or about a singer in a German court of the 1780s simply could not have the same implications as doing so as a Parisian connoisseur of the 1840s. The following chapter does not aim at a complete, exhaustive analysis of all aspects of French and German musical culture and aesthetics, but rather at highlighting its important key aspects, which are essential in order to understand the complexities and

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<sup>29</sup> By 'gender dichotomy' I mean fixed, unalterable and hierarchical categories of 'male' and 'female' as they were for instance advocated by gender theories during the period in question, as opposed to a 'gender dialects', which implies more fluid, shifting gender categories. See Richardson, 'Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine', *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne Mellor (Bloomington, IUP, 1988), p.22.



underpinnings of the motif, and the context into which the singer was born, both as a socio-cultural type and as a literary motif.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Writing in Context: 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Musical Culture**

Within the frame of late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture, the singer appears as a complex literary motif which evolved throughout a period of political and social transition and profound changes in musical, literary and socio-cultural aesthetics. We can only properly address the individual case studies and the complexities of the motif if we set our literary discussion against the background of the musical culture and aesthetics of the time and establish the interdisciplinary reality of a literary discourse so deeply intertwined with the socio-cultural reality of the time.

As I have made explicit in the previous chapter, a substantial amount of historical and musicological scholarship of the period exists, and increasingly, there are studies with a focus on female music history. Based on this knowledge, the aim of this chapter on musical culture is to illustrate the background against which I shall read my case studies, and to highlight crucial aspects of musical culture and aesthetics as they relate to authors of the period. Although I partly draw on existing musicological and socio-cultural scholarship, my discussion of the interdependence between socio-cultural and literary discourse will bring forth a re-appraisal of the woman singer in context, and thus be of use to literary, musicological and cultural scholars alike. After a brief outline of the bourgeois imagery of musical culture, I will discuss the female dimension of musical culture, and to what extent this perceived 'femininity' of music implied the traditional sense of ambiguity attached to both music and woman. I shall exemplify the ambiguity associated with female musicality by briefly outlining the contested areas of education and real-life singers who became increasingly prominent figures of public female musicality.



## The Reality of Literature: Court Culture and Bourgeois Pastimes

When we look at musical culture before and after 1800, two aspects especially stand out as relevant to the evolution of the woman singer. To begin with, the period may be seen as the first vogue of mass musical culture whose most significant trait, setting it apart from earlier periods, is the rise of bourgeois music<sup>30</sup> and the increased professionalization, as well as popularisation of musicians and their business.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, as I will elaborate further on, it is a musical period particularly marked by increasingly female musical practice, during which the imagery and the myth of the woman singer took a distinctive form.

The woman singer did not emerge out of nowhere: throughout earlier music history, one does encounter women musicians, mostly singers, sometimes instrumentalists or composers, or a mixture of all three. Despite the church's ban on the female voice and more or less severe general restrictions, women did sing and practise music; however, this practice implied a clear division cemented since antiquity between the well-bred, respectable amateur and her professional counterpart, the latter always associated with immorality and prostitution.<sup>32</sup> The rise of opera and secular music from 1600 onwards, together with the general evolution of women's legal and social status, gradually opened up more possibilities for them to engage in music, usually as singers, and, under royal protection, to embrace a career as professional performers.<sup>33</sup> Although never without controversy, the singing career was one of the earliest and more accessible artistic professions for women of the middle classes, i.e. who did not come from music families, though the

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<sup>30</sup> The term 'bourgeois' in this context means 'middle class', and refers to the culture and aesthetics of the middle classes in France and Germany during the period in question, and to their predominance in shaping contemporary musical culture and aesthetics.

<sup>31</sup> See Gramit (especially pp.125-60); Bailbé, pp.14ff.; Tunley, *Salons, Singers and Songs* (especially pp.1-18).

<sup>32</sup> See Diane Touliatos, 'The Traditional Role of Greek Women in Music from Antiquity to the End of the Byzantine Empire, in *Rediscovering the Muses*, pp.111-23 (pp.114-16.); Tick, 'Women in Music', p.521. However, the original platonic differentiation between respectable and 'professional' women musicians as put forward in both studies has been relativized by Roger Harmon, 'Plato, Aristotle and Women Musicians', *MAL*, 86.3 (2005), 351-56. On medieval female music, see Coldwell, 'Jouglers and Trobairitz: Secular Musicians in Medieval France', in *Women Making Music*, pp.39-61; Marshall, 'Symbols, Performers and Sponsors', in *Rediscovering the Muses*, pp.140-68.

<sup>33</sup> Though early singers like Francesca Caccini and Barbara Strozzi were accomplished composers, women continued to be accepted as performers rather than composers – a situation that becomes more dramatic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Anderson/Zinsser, II, pp.175f.)



implications of such a career, as well as its obstacles, in theory and practice will be discussed further on.<sup>34</sup>

Court culture played an important role in making music accessible to women before 1800,<sup>35</sup> since the nobility was able to promote musical practice across social classes and across the divide between amateurs and professionals, while serving as the foremost example of positive dilettantism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century:<sup>36</sup> Though usually not in the professional sense, singing, composition and instrumental practice were widespread among women of a certain social standing, and the division between nobility, middle classes and artists sometimes appears less strict.<sup>37</sup>

A typical representative of German *Residenzkultur*, Anna Amalia of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, duchess of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, came to be known as a highly accomplished composer, musician and art patron who presided over the Weimar court of muses and under whose tutelage art and especially music thrived. Long before he was made a noble, Goethe became Weimar's artistic director, working with professional artists and amateurs alike and basking in the ideal of an all-encompassing art practice.<sup>38</sup> In France, musical life thrived under the patrons of the *Ancien Régime*, such as Louis XIV and Marie-Antoinette. The queen was herself an accomplished singer, harpist and harpsichordist, and music was extremely popular among the aristocracy, in the forms of the public *Concerts Spirituels* series, Oratorios, church performances, *tragédies lyriques* and opera.<sup>39</sup> Women performers of both sacred and secular music were the customary and women singers often

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<sup>34</sup> See Anderson/Zinsser, II, pp.62ff. Hoffmann calls the musical career the first *qualified* profession for middle-class women ('Institutionelle Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten', p.79).

<sup>35</sup> Noteworthy musicians to emerge out of this context include Madame de Genlis and Claude Jacquet de la Guerre. The latter's 'très beau génie' was praised by Titon du Tillet who accorded an important space to women musicians and dancers in his *Parnasse françois* (p.636).

<sup>36</sup> See pp.23ff.

<sup>37</sup> Sadie, pp.203 f; Tick, 'Women in Music', p.526. Reich however argues for a rather strict professional divide between bourgeoisie and artist class ('Women as Musicians', pp.125 f). The cases of the Comtesse de Genlis, Henriette Sontag and Rosine Stoltz show that it was not impossible to combine professional musicianship with social status.

<sup>38</sup> The Weimar court of muses perfected the cult of the Aeolian harp as a reverence to both Greek aesthetics and natural music. Performances often took place outdoors, with rather purist accompaniments. See Düll, *Frau und Musik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, pp.151-79; *Der Weimarer Musenhof. Dichtung, Musik und Tanz, Gartenkunst, Geselligkeit, Malerei*, ed. Gabriele Busch-Salmen/ Walter Salmen/Christoph Michel (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998). Tunley records a similar mixture of different hierarchies and social classes in 19<sup>th</sup>-century French culture (*Music in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Parisian Salon*, pp.13-22).

<sup>39</sup> See Sadie, pp.192/200; Jamain, pp.51-63.



aspired to the financial security and professional recognition of the court singer position – not surprisingly, since the imagery of the singer had always retained its ambivalent connotation of immorality and frivolity. Court culture offered a specific, yet rich context for female singers, and serves as a socio-cultural backdrop to some singer narratives.<sup>40</sup>

However, it is with the rise of the middle classes towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that musical culture not only became a mass phenomenon, but also that the situation of female singers, as of musicians in general, changed, both positively and negatively. By the time the young Goethe became artistic director in Weimar, music was no longer a privileged practice of the clergy or the nobility, or an immoral profession associated with wandering artist-musicians, but had become an accessible pastime for the newly emerging middle classes with their taste for opera and public performances and a desire to appropriate the fantasy of music for themselves. The vogue of *Volksmusik* in the German-speaking countries and the *Chansons populaires* in France both pertinently reflect this new desire for a collective musical genius that would also educate and unite the masses.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the widening accessibility of music provided an important backdrop to increasing domestic and public female musical practice as well, coinciding with a new-found vocality: genres like opera, lieder and romances in particular reflect a central dichotomy of 19<sup>th</sup>-century music, the preference for an intimate, ‘natural’ music experience on the one side<sup>42</sup>, yet also the increased need for qualified female performers to sing on stage on the other –such diametrically opposed *feminising* developments in musical practice and aesthetics brought with them a very specific context in which the woman singer evolved.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Whereas Heinse, Goethe and Hoffmann set their narratives in an aristocratic context, women authors like Staël, Fischer, Sand, Taunay and Ulliac debate the implications of social status for their singers. The question of artist and class in general becomes a pressing issue for writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>41</sup> See Jamain, pp.293-96; Fulcher, ‘The Popular Chanson’, pp.29-32; Gramit, pp.103-13.

<sup>42</sup> By ‘natural’, I refer to the common perception of music as a naturally-given attribute which women were said to possess and to be inclined to (see also pp.24ff.). The performance ideal for women referred to what was perceived as a ‘natural’ setting for female music practice, i.e. the salon and the private space, but also to the ‘natural’ quality of female song as not professionally trained and as a ‘natural’ attribute of women’s charms in society.

<sup>43</sup> See Citron, ‘Women and the Lied, 1775-1850’, in *Women Making Music*, pp.224-48; Bailbé, pp.14-23. On the importance of the piano in domestic musical culture see Burgan, ‘Heroines at the

Music became a predominant public and domestic preoccupation among the middle classes who, through money, taste and writing significantly influenced important developments in musical practice and aesthetics – a point which has prompted scholars to regard musical life as the ‘province of the middle classes’,<sup>44</sup> and the ‘bourgeois family as the real engine of larger-scale cultural developments’.<sup>45</sup> As an intrinsic part of middle class upbringing and daily life, music was enjoyed by most men and women from middle to upper class backgrounds, albeit not professionally. With the decline in importance of the courts, musical culture was essentially shaped by the middle and upper classes, whose salons became increasingly important as platforms for new music and aspiring musicians, as well as being a place for discussions of art and music. If we are to believe certain authors like Goethe (who had his own house choir)<sup>46</sup> or Hoffmann, the very private performances at home were particularly cherished. Some highly respected institutions like the Berlin *Singakademie* grew out of informal gatherings among music lovers and included both male and female voices.<sup>47</sup> In this ferment of middle class musical culture, women played a vital role as intellectuals and artistic patrons, as practitioners and members of the audience. Madame de Staël had unrivalled freedom as the patron of the *Groupe de Coppet*, a circle of like-minded artists and intellectuals, while Pauline Viardot’s and George Sand’s prominent circles of friends account for an extremely rich musical-literary discourse, of which both gave ample testimony. Although it may seem more logical to think of 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers as consumers of music, an impression to which numerous ‘opera visit’ or ‘musical gathering’ scenes in novels may have contributed, authors, especially those featured in this study, played a multi-faceted role of music practitioner and writer, theorist and consumer. In fact, all the authors that I have chosen for my case studies fit into the mould of the highly accomplished amateur musician, in the case of Goethe, Madame de Staël, George Sand, if not into that of the professional musician, as in

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Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction’, *VST*, 30.1 (Autumn 1986), 51-76; Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, p.36.

<sup>44</sup> Reich, p.130. See also Weber, pp.30-52; Bailbé, pp.105-27.

<sup>45</sup> Solie, ‘*Music in other Words*’, p.87.

<sup>46</sup> See Salmen, pp.74-78.

<sup>47</sup> Yet Rieger (*Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp.71-75) alludes to the male bias in choral singing, which aimed to exclude women from choirs and promote a distinct masculine, aggressive and nationalist singing tradition.



the case of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Berlioz, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Caroline Auguste Fischer. All the authors in this study had an imminent approach to music in that they were subjected to similar musical drills during their childhood and that, as intellectuals, they were fully immersed in the musical-literary discourse of the time, dealing with music and musicians on a practical and theoretical level. Several authors were active contributors to the newly emerging music journals, such as the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, which proposed a broad treatment of music theory and practice, from music reviews to performance calendars and inventions of new musical instruments, to discussions on musical metaphysics and treatises on the human singing voice.<sup>48</sup> Slightly later than in Germany, the vogue of bourgeois musical culture as a social phenomenon and mass-compatible art form only developed in France from the 1830s onward, propelled by the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*,<sup>49</sup> which dealt with all aspects of French musical life, reviewing new musical pieces, as well as performances by the musicians and singers in vogue. Salon activities were chronicled, as were developments of musical instruments and the activities of the Paris Conservatoire. Like the *AMZ*, the *RGM* was a platform for musical-literary debates, highlighting the strong cross-currents and reciprocity between music and literature, which redefined notions of musical journalism and literature thanks to contributors like Hector Berlioz, Jules Janin, George Sand and Honoré de Balzac, who all published musical fiction in various art and music journals.<sup>50</sup>

While it may seem that this newly-developing quality of music as an art capable of transcending gender and class reunited like-minded artist-intellectuals and allowed for important traditions of female music and song to develop, the dichotomy implied in female song, between ideal and reality, in fact grew stronger. Between the flamboyance of the public stage and the sanctity of the ‘private-public’ salons where

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<sup>48</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1798-1865).

<sup>49</sup> A fusion of Fétis’s *Revue musicale* (1827-1835) and Schlesinger’s *Gazette Musicale de Paris* (1834-1835), the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* successfully ran from 1835 to 1880. Other noteworthy journals include the *Revue de Paris* (1829-1858), *L’Artiste* (1831-1904) and *La Revue des deux mondes* (1829-)

<sup>50</sup> See Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France. La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834-1880* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995); Brzoska, *Die Idee des Gesamtkunstwerkes in der Musiknovellistik der Julimonarchie* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995), pp.23-49; Tunley, *Salons, Singers and Songs*, pp.7-9.)

women could appear musically without risking their reputation and their status,<sup>51</sup> the debate over the woman singer as an ideal of female domesticity or an embodiment of indecent female performance intensified, as did the discrepancy between the ideal of female song (and its implied constraints on women in terms of musical training, professionalism and performance space) and the reality of the singer-performer. Indeed, it is with the rise of bourgeois musical culture that we witness an unprecedented rift in musical aesthetics which we will discuss in the next section: as music became more accessible and more professional, with the ‘professional musician’ emancipating himself from patronage and embracing the career paths of composer of genius and acclaimed virtuoso, women singers logically had a share in these developments. Yet the traditional double-bind of female musicality, with its ancient taboo of the musical feminine, continued to shape the image of the singer, deepening the rift between the ideal of woman as ‘musical’, and women making music – the essential conflict of ideal and performance that becomes apparent in numerous texts of the time.

### **The Rift Within the Myth: *Female and Feminine Music***

Alongside the increasing professionalization of music, a significant part of musical culture was female, domestic musical practice engaged in by women dilettantes at home or in the salons, and encouraged by women as patrons and salon hostesses. Music was regarded as an intrinsic part of female nature, that is, as an art form towards which women were said to be naturally inclined to and which was said to best express the female psyche<sup>52</sup> – as such, it constituted a ‘natural’ attribute of female beauty and a powerful tool of sexual attractiveness that greatly enhanced marriage prospects.<sup>53</sup> Thus, regardless of talent, girls were made to sit down at the piano, take singing lessons and learn to entertain their families with pleasant

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<sup>51</sup> For a theory on the ‘public privacy’ of the salon as a space of morally legitimized artistic freedom see Jürgen Kesting, ‘Salon – Thesen zu einem gesellschaftlichen Ort der Musik im 19. Jahrhundert’, *MUB*, 9.7/8 (1977), 337-80.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance Jean Paul’s and Caroline de la Motte Fouqué’s remarks on the ‘naturally musical’ female soul in chapter 3.

<sup>53</sup> See Anderson/Zinsser, II, pp.156ff.



melodies. This was an archetypal drill that most women authors (and many male authors, too) of the time could relate from personal experience. We can assume that singing was the most widespread musical activity among women, since, due to the strict gender dichotomy of the time, female music remained confined to the home and to suitable instruments: piano, song and the harp.<sup>54</sup> The archetypal *girling* at the parlour piano was part of a woman's socialisation and gender performance, 'the social process that forms girls appropriate to the needs of the society they live in',<sup>55</sup> but also their own re-enactment of that myth of femininity which was the woman musician. Pragmatic as much as ideologically charged, song was both a sign of female grace and of what characterized womanhood; it was a domestic, female activity and one of the first educational tasks of a mother towards her children.<sup>56</sup> Even at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were still traditionally associated with poetry and the songs of the people: 'Mädchen und Frauen sind von alters her die berufenen Hüterinnen des dichterischen Gutes, das im Volkslied ruht'.<sup>57</sup> The term of *dilettantism*<sup>58</sup> left its mark on female musicality during this period and requires a short explanation in this context. Although the notion of dilettante received an increasingly negative connotation during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a mark of artistic mediocrity or insufficiency, it was originally not used in this negative denotation. Rather, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, dilettantism referred to the music lover and practitioner who, usually a noble person, had to be set apart from the lower class of the artist-musician who had to make a living from music. Before the institutionalization of music education towards the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, both dilettante and professional received similar music training in the form of personal tuition/apprenticeships. Thus, for a long time, musical dilettantism had been one of the pillars of European musical culture, alongside church music and the popular music of wandering musicians and performance troupes. Aristocrats were amateur

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<sup>54</sup> See Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*; pp.48-75; Reich, pp.132 ff; Hoffmann, *Instrument und Körper*, pp.131 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Solie thus defines the term 'girling' in *Music in other Words*, p.86.

<sup>56</sup> See Gramit, pp.113 ff.; Rieger, *Frau und Musik*, pp.21-22.

<sup>57</sup> *Lehrplan für das Jahr 1894*, cit. in Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, p.66.

<sup>58</sup> Both French (1740) and German (1759) acquired the Italian term towards the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was still used in the original sense of the Latin 'delectare', to refer to non-professional, 'amateur' music lovers and practitioners. More than 'dilettante', the term 'amateur' has kept the positive meaning. See *Dictionnaire historique*, I, p.1087; *Deutsches Fremdwörterbuch*, IV, pp.580-88.

musicians because the mere status and need to make a living would have been below them. Especially for well-bred women, music was regarded as self-cultivation.

Dilettantes like Anna Amalia or Marie-Antoinette, or writers like Bettina Brentano could easily have passed as 'professional' musicians, had it not been for their social standing. The French-German musical-literary discourse that evolved during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have been unthinkable without the support of this largely positive dilettante culture.

However, the distinct class-divide that separated the musician from the rest of society in terms of money also became more pronounced through the image of the professional musician as a sublime artist and musical genius, ideals which all nurtured the myth of the musician – as we have already seen, the conditions have always been harder on women as 'public performers'.

With the commercialisation of music and the debate on artistic genius emerging from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>59</sup> and with the increase in musical education and professionalism, dilettantism, a trademark of middle class art-practice, became more and more linked to female music-making, marking the divide between well-educated (and mostly male) professionals and privately or self-taught (mostly female) amateurs.<sup>60</sup> In what scholars consider a rift in 19<sup>th</sup>-century music aesthetics, professional musicians, as composer geniuses and virtuosos appropriated the 'high' discourse on music, whereas musical dilettantism became a question of confined female musicality at home, compliant with views on female insufficiency and domesticity. In the case of a woman's song, this becomes an important issue, all the more as professional women musicians were equally targeted with the dilettante stigma, a verdict that had been less pronounced for female musicians before 1800, yet which became more important as women struggled to close the gap between themselves and their newly-trained and male colleagues-turned-geniuses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we move through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many narratives not only focus on the 'otherness' of the singer in terms of her artistic identity and social status outside the

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<sup>59</sup> See pp.63-67.

<sup>60</sup> Goethe's and Schiller's concepts proved crucial for the link between woman, nature and dilettantism (Schiller/Goethe, *Über den Dilettantismus*, FA XVIII, pp.739-86). The *Musicalisches Conversations-Lexicon* (1835) explicitly blends musical dilettantism and woman (Nieberle, pp.46-52); Rieger (*Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, p.37) concedes to the necessity of professional women singers in the music business, yet stresses the double-bind that these women experienced.



norms, but also on the very basic question of education and professionalism, and women's share in the new music business, which I will briefly outline in the next paragraph.

On the one hand, as women were still debarred from orchestras, and a career in the opera, let alone in church music, was not automatically aspired to by middle-class women musicians, domestic music-making was one legitimate way for them to play the piano and sing. In the sense of positive dilettantism, salon music constituted a 'gateway to diverse musical occupations and professional recognition',<sup>61</sup> and it was equally able to offer professional singers a fulfilling career as salon performers. On the other hand, unlike other musicians, the singer had to navigate the dangerous line between the public and the private spheres, for which the compromise of the salon space is symptomatic. The many areas of daily culture in which women could become musicians said little about their actual struggles and about the deep divide that ran between domestic and professional musicians, between what we perceive to be a *female* musical culture and women's relative freedom to enjoy musical practice, and the limitations and theoretical obstacles that weighed on the *feminine* side of music. However art-loving and musical the long 19<sup>th</sup> century may seem, it was characterized by an increased solidification of segregated gender characteristics and roles, leading to a striking discourse of gender dichotomy in music, to the detriment of women. Singing at home or in the salons may have been a staple of a girl's upbringing, yet if they had professional ambitions, women found themselves caught in the fundamental struggle of negotiating their artistic and professional pursuits against what society demanded of them as daughters, wives and mothers, the only roles that contemporary discourse saw them as fit to fulfil, and which could only allow them to be 'natural women', i.e. not professionally trained, musical dilettantes. This, as we shall see in the following chapter, causes an important rift between the actual implications of music as a 'female' domain on the one hand, and the 'feminisation' of the musical-literary discourse on the other, between a realistic struggle for artistic expression and professionalism on the one hand, and the relegation of female musicality into the realm of the ideal and its limitations on the other – backed up by both the cult of the mother and domestic woman, and her

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<sup>61</sup> Tick, 'Women in Music', p.527.

elevation into the realm of artistic passivity as a muse. This appears as the central conflict of femininity and music, between idealism and professionalism, so aptly embodied by the singer myth and its literary treatment. One of the central areas of dispute relating to women in general, namely the question of education, will serve to further illustrate the polemics attached to the double-bind of female musicality.

### **Idle Pursuits: Educating the Muses**

Although music and song were considered part of 'female nature', the true ideal of femininity was domestic life. If a woman wanted to become a professional singer, she had to overcome both theoretical obstacles and factual debarments, which served to cement a woman's place at home, as a wife and mother, while stressing the unwomanly, frivolous nature of the professional woman artist who defied the biological and social order. In the wake of the French Revolution, legal reforms such as the *Code Napoléon* (1804) and the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (1794) effectively reduced women to the property of their husbands, and to the roles of wife and mother.<sup>62</sup> Philosophers and educators alike stressed the fact that not only were women incapable of achieving higher goals as artists, and as musicians in particular, but also that their nature prescribed the role of wife and mother. Ideal femininity equalled domesticity, with the realistic demands of the household often not leaving enough time for serious artistic pursuits (and certainly not leaving the time required for professional art practice). Most influential male intellectuals of the time agreed that a woman should not aspire to professional music. Music was perceived as a feminine domain, and as an expression, a quasi-natural extension of female nature, but not in the sense of an intellectual capacity or cultivation, preserved for male genius and thus inaccessible for women. Defying the biological and social order by pursuing music professionally subjected women to reproaches of immorality, prostitution, 'semi-masculinity'<sup>63</sup> and failure of their biologically predetermined role

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<sup>62</sup> See Anderson/ Zinsser, II, pp.143-151.

<sup>63</sup> See Julien-Joseph Virey, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* (cit. in Escal/Rousseau-Dujardin, p.61); Jean-Pierre Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme, Œuvres philosophiques I* (Paris: PUF, 1956), pp.297-99.



as wife and mother. Musical education for girls and women was expected and desired, yet it did not aim very high: 'En ces temps, la jeune fille bien éduquée devait savoir peindre et chanter, jouer des instruments de musique, écrire des vers, soutenir une conversation brillante. Peinture et musique restaient des arts au féminin pour l'agrément de la vie mondaine publique'.<sup>64</sup> A woman's 'natural' (i.e. not professionally trained) musicality was to complement her female nature and charms as a desirable wife and mother functioning within a social context of musical pleasure; but not to make her an artist.<sup>65</sup>

As a pan-European phenomenon, Rousseau had a significant impact on French and German aesthetics, both as a musician (whose thoughts on music significantly shaped the musical-literary discourse, as I will discuss in the next chapter), and as a pedagogue. Rousseau set the tone for female education in his *Émile*, in which he portrays his vision of womanhood, female upbringing and behaviour through the character of Sophie. His theory on women's inferiority had long-term repercussions for girls' and women's education:

Sophie a des talents naturels; elle les sent, et ne les a pas négligés: mais n'ayant pas été à portée de mettre beaucoup d'art à leur culture, elle s'est contentée d'exercer sa jolie voix à chanter juste et avec goût, [...] peu à peu elle devint sensible à l'harmonie; enfin, en grandissant, elle a commencé de sentir les charmes de l'expression, et d'aimer la musique pour elle-même. Mais c'est un goût plutôt qu'un talent; elle ne sait point déchiffrer un air sur la note.<sup>66</sup>

Rousseau strongly discouraged artistic education for women, since he considered them to be incapable of artistic sensibility and genius and regarded their 'natural' duty to act as carers for their husbands and families. Reiterating the cultural stereotype of music's dangerous sensuality, Rousseau discouraged female music tuition at the hands of untrustworthy, frivolous music instructors who would deter girls from their naturally-given role and expose them to immorality:

J'ai quelque peine à croire que le commerce de ces gens-là ne soit pas plus nuisible à de jeunes filles que leurs leçons ne leur sont utiles, et que leur jargon, leur ton,

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<sup>64</sup> Escal/Rousseau-Dujardin, p.69.

<sup>65</sup> Abraham Mendelssohn's advice to his daughter Fanny is well-known: 'Du musst Dich ernster und emsiger zu Deinem eigentlichen Beruf, zum *einzigsten* Beruf eines Mädchens, zur Hausfrau, bilden'. (Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn*, pp.115-16).

<sup>66</sup> *Émile ou de l'Éducation*, V, p.583.

leurs airs, ne donnent pas à leurs écolières le premier goût des frivolités, pour eux si importantes, dont elles ne tarderont guère, à leur exemple, de faire leur unique occupation.<sup>67</sup>

However, like other authors' views on female nature, Rousseau's were not always consistent. Diderot, rather divided on the topic of female music education, conceded that 'quand elles ont du génie, je leur en crois l'empreinte plus originale que nous'.<sup>68</sup> Allowing his own daughter to be trained as a pianist and composer, Diderot displayed the typically ambiguous attitude of a man of the Enlightenment who, despite advocating education and autonomy of the mind, and while being pleased with his daughter's talents and achievements, clearly saw the limits of a well-bred woman musician as for professionalism and personal freedom.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Rousseau admitted in an unpublished manuscript that women could be capable of heroic acts.<sup>70</sup> Not surprisingly, contemporary women writers struggled with what they perceived as a fundamental paradox of general human perfectibility: 'He [Rousseau] chuses a common capacity to educate – and gives as a reason, that a genius will educate itself'.<sup>71</sup> Recognizing themselves in Rousseau's vision of the 'natural' man of genius, they still had to come to terms with Sophie, whom Rousseau created as a 'naturally' docile and ignorant partner to Émile, qualities that Rousseau envisioned for a natural state of humankind without a need for professionalism.<sup>72</sup> Of the many female intellectuals, Mary Wollstonecraft perhaps most prominently appropriated Rousseauesque aesthetics by extending them to

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.553.

<sup>68</sup> Diderot, *Sur les Femmes, Œuvres complètes X*, p.53.

<sup>69</sup> Diderot's daughter abandoned music after her marriage. Her apprenticeship survived in the form of Diderot's *Leçons de Clavecin et Principes d'Harmonie*, co-authored with Marie's music teacher Anton Bemetzrieder. See Lilo Gersdorf, 'Diderot's Tochter', in *Frau und Musik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, pp.83-93.

<sup>70</sup> See Escal/Rousseau-Dujardin, p.40.

<sup>71</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, letter to her sister Everina, 14.03.1787 (*The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd; London: Allen Lane, 2003: pp.114-15).

<sup>72</sup> Isabelle de Charrière especially struggled with Rousseau's educational ideals for women and developed antagonistic views in her works. See Didier, *L'Écriture-femme* (Paris: PUF, 1981), p.99; Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau, 'Isabelle de Charrière, pédagogue', in *Belle de Zuylen/Isabelle de Charrière*, pp.49-68. Charrière's double significance as a writer and a musician/composer has only started to attract scholarly attention. See Jacqueline Letzter's standard works (co-authored with Robert Adelson): 'Un drame d'ambitions déçues: les opéras d'Isabelle de Charrière', *RDT*, 195 (Fall 1997), 235-54; *Women Writing Opera: Creativity and Controversy in the Age of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: UCP, 2001).



women.<sup>73</sup> Despite the odd concessions and contradictions in men's theories on women, the prevailing argument was that of women's 'natural' inferiority to men and, consequently, their secondary role as helpers of art, but not artists in their own right. In concurrence with European iconography idealizing the Muses, *Musica* and St. Cecilia, 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics regarded woman in herself as art – woman *was* song, was the embodiment of music, but she could never have access to this specific type of artistic sublimity herself as a means to create. This viewpoint remained firmly in place until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Ist also die Frau nicht imstande, Kunst zu schaffen, die Ideen des Lebens bewusst bildend, plastisch zu gestalten, so ist ihr Naturell doch mit Kunst verwandt. Sie selbst ist als Seele und Erscheinung ein Kunstwerk der Natur, wie der große männliche Schöpfer ein Kunstwerk der Kultur ist. [...] Die Frau ist künstlerisch unproduktiv, aber sie ist als Individuum ästhetisch im Körperlichen und Geistigen.<sup>74</sup>

In the wake of Rousseau's influential *Émile*, all noteworthy educators frowned on the possibility of female education as a pretention to render women virile and thus, immoral and frivolous – in that, the educated woman as a 'public woman' joined ranks with the professional singer and the prostitute. On the German side, the pedagogue Johann Campe cemented the dogma of women's 'natural' purpose and destiny in life: 'Unter hundert preiswürdigen Tonkünstlerinnen, Zeichnerinnen, Stickerinnen, Tänzerinnen usw. möchte wohl kaum eine gefunden werden, die zugleich alle Pflichten einer vernünftigen und guten Gattin, einer auf alles aufmerksamen und selbsttätigen Hausfrau und einer sorgfältigen Mutter [...] zu erfüllen nur versteht.'<sup>75</sup> Later intellectuals reiterated this dichotomy, stressing that a respectable, 'natural' woman could never take upon herself to pursue either education or art extensively, nor should she try to, since her 'natural' (biological, intellectual and artistic) deficiencies would stand in her way. In his educational

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<sup>73</sup> *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, chapter V, pp.102-43 (p.111; 116-18).

<sup>74</sup> Karl Scheffler [1908], *Die Frau und die Kunst*, cit. in Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, p.121. See also Cäcilia Rentmeister's study on woman as allegory: 'Berufsverbot für die Musen', *AUK*, 7/25 (1976), 92-113.

<sup>75</sup> Campe, *Väterlicher Rat für meine Tochter*, p.53. Like most authors, Campe does not consider the arts part of women's *Bestimmung* (p.59). Contemporary pedagogues like Basedow developed similar views; '[...] daß die erste Virtuosin, die beste Sängerin und die belesenste, fertigste Künstlerin eine schlechte Gattin, eine schlechte Hausfrau und eine schlechte Mutter sei' (*Pädagogische Unterhandlungen* I, Dessau, 1777, pp. 10-84).

programmes and reforms, Wilhelm von Humboldt did not even consider girls, since as future wives and mothers, they had no need to learn.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, French educational concepts catered poorly to girls, and unanimously discouraged musical education.<sup>77</sup> Although some women ventured forward with educational treatises, like Betty Gleim, Amalia Holst, Madame de Genlis and Isabelle de Charrière,<sup>78</sup> these female views on education said surprisingly little about the question of creative genius in women, and whether or not girls had a right to proper artistic education, or whether they should even aspire to it in the case of genuine talent. In general, despite recognizing the need for proper education, female-authored treatises put women's role as a mother and wife at the forefront and tried to harmonize women's education with their future role at home. A woman should be educated not for her own sake, but so that she could be a better mother (and educator) to her children.<sup>79</sup> One German pedagogue and musician, Nina d'Aubigny von Engelbrunner (1770-1847) stands out as the author of the musical treatise *Briefe an Nathalie über den Gesang* (1804), a work known for having been appreciated by Beethoven. In this, she stresses the importance of musical education for women; yet again she does so in the context of women's general duty as wife and mother at home. Song and music should not serve female self-expression, but rather make marriage and life in the household more pleasant and cultivated.<sup>80</sup> In summary, female music education could only try to bring out the 'natural' musicality of womanhood, for the sake of harmonious marriage and motherhood, but never in the sense of erudition and artistic craftsmanship.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This view was consistent with his infamous theory of gendered character, which diametrically opposed female, receptive passivity with male aggressiveness and creative activity (*Über den Geschlechtsunterschied*, *Werke* I, especially pp.277ff, 286ff).

<sup>77</sup> See Isabelle Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches: l'éducation des jeunes filles au XIXe siècle*; Rebecca Rogers, 'Boarding Schools, Women Teachers and Domesticity: Reforming Girls' Secondary Education in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *FHS*, 19.1 (Spring 1995), 154-81.

<sup>78</sup> Amalia Holst, *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zu höherer Geistesbildung* (Berlin: Frölich, 1802); Betty Gleim, *Erziehung und Unterricht des weiblichen Geschlechts* (Leipzig: Göschen, 1810); Gleim severely criticizes the lack of education for female music teachers who are part of a new proletariat of professional women musicians (see Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp.67-68).

<sup>79</sup> Both Rieger (*Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp.64 ff.) and Gramit (pp.96 ff.) comment on the almost propagandistic nature of folk music, in which mothers took a central role.

<sup>80</sup> For a more detailed study of Engelbrunner's work, see Rieger, *Frau und Musik*; Nieberle, pp.29-35; and Manfred Elsberger's biography *Nina d'Aubigny von Engelbrunner* (München: Allitera, 2000)

<sup>81</sup> See Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp.40 ff. Rieger speaks of the dangerous *Halbbildung* to which women remained confined throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (p.50).



Educating oneself in order to become a professional singer was consequently less a true choice than a question of opportunities and character. An aspiring singer needed technique and determination to defy the social, cultural and intellectual standards and conceptions of femininity of her time; and above all, the courage to face the accusation of not being a good wife and mother and thus of violating that which nature, God and patriarchal society considered her only function in life. Interestingly, the exception to the rule can be found in some texts arguing that if a woman possessed the necessary talent and ambition, she could make a legitimate claim for a professional artistic career: 'Für diese gibt es keinen Grad, keine Grenze; höhere Ausbildung und vermehrter Nutzen sind hier genau miteinander verbunden'.<sup>82</sup> Not all men categorically denied the possibility of female artistic excellence; some admitted that in the rare case of exceptional talent, a woman could pursue a professional career. As for literature, the question of educating the singer is a fascinating, if sensitive issue that touches upon such central paradigms as musical genius and its origins, and the fantasy of the divine singing voice that we will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter. As we will see in many of the case studies, the singer's education, or lack thereof is directly related to her artistic makeup and agenda, to the singer's claim for musical genius and professionalism, thus highlighting the very different facets of female song as an ideal as well as a very realistic type of female performance.

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<sup>82</sup> Guthmann, 'Grad der musikalischen Bildung bei Frauenzimmern', *AMZ*, 9.24 (11.03.1807), p.380.

## Negotiating Ideal and Performance: Real-Life Singers

Despite the rise of instrumental and orchestral music, a large part of musical culture was dedicated to song and vocal music, an area which, as I have explained, was nurtured and represented by women musicians and singers, professionals and amateurs alike, both reflected upon in the musical-literary discourse. Between the salon and the opera stage, female song implies a breadth of aesthetics and performance possibilities; yet while I have briefly outlined the importance of female song as a cipher for ideal female domesticity, it was the professional singer who pushed the boundaries of female song further. Of all possible artistic careers, especially in music, becoming a singer remained the first choice for talented women with the right education, support and determination, just as singing at home remained a pertinent pastime for young girls, wives and mothers. Singers count among the first true female artists who, unlike women writers, did not revert to male pseudonyms or husband-publishers, but whose struggle for performance *in public* appears more visceral, bridging more visibly the gap between female ideal and reality.

Court life, and then increasingly bourgeois musical culture provided opportunities for financial stability and career prospects, although most singers were self-employed and working under the pressure of both financial need and society's problematic attitude towards the working woman artist. As such, it is not easy to classify the woman singer according to types, or to unanimously brand all singers as social pariahs, struggling music teachers or *femme fatale* divas. Despite real and theoretical obstacles, many singers enjoyed a fulfilling career, either in the salons, at the courts or on the opera stage, providing some of the finest vocal performances in 19<sup>th</sup>-century music history and supporting the ongoing vogue of vocal music. Some women went very far in their respective careers, such as Gertrud 'La Mara' Schmeling (1749-1833), Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient (1804-1860),<sup>83</sup> Henriette Sontag (1806-1854), Maria Malibran (1808-1836) and her younger sister Pauline Viardot (1821-1910). The personal lives and artistic merits of these women significantly contributed to shaping the myth of the diva, as did writers' accounts of

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<sup>83</sup> The erotic novel *Memoiren einer deutschen Sängerin* (1861) was falsely attributed to her.



these seemingly extravagant, liberated women, whose art was just as important as their allure.<sup>84</sup>

More than for male singers of the time, we find strong reactions to female performers – both positive and negative, and often enough, a pronounced fascination with the woman singer on the part of writers such as Goethe, Hoffmann and especially Berlioz, whose collaboration with Pauline Viardot produced some of the finest art in mid-century France. Yet even in these high-profile women performers, we find the problematic, if fascinating mixture of myth and reality, of female musicality and professionalism and its associated fantasy of the musical feminine, furthered by a male-dominated music business and its patriarchal attitudes: ‘Men held the important posts in music education and publishing, formed the committees making decisions for concerts, organizations and festivals, conducted the orchestras, hired the players, and determined the fees.’<sup>85</sup> Fighting on difficult grounds in terms of morality and social norms, the singer possessed relative freedom and artistic agency as a working woman artist, yet often at the cost of bitter real-life struggles. Despite the glamorous image and the mystified ideal of song, becoming a singer and living as a singer, the ‘performance’ of that role, was by no means an easy task, and the demands on professional singers were extremely strenuous. In spite of, or perhaps because of, her relative freedom, the singer depended on those men that held the positions of power in the music business, with some of them taking advantage of their female protégées.<sup>86</sup> A financially independent, working woman, she deeply shook the patriarchal value of the man as provider for his family; and what is more, the singer sold her body to the audience.

Behind the diva myth and the reputation of capriciousness and sexual insatiability, most singers were hard-working women from usually modest backgrounds, who lived a highly disciplined life in a business where few succeeded, often forsaking personal happiness for their careers. Perhaps adding to the myth of the prima donna, singers were often self-taught and worked hard to gain their way

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<sup>84</sup> The imagery of the diva is extremely rich, as proven by the accounts of music journals and literature alike, as well as by the life stories of individual singers. See Christiansen; Rutherford; Emerson; Rieger, *Göttliche Stimmen. Lebensberichte berühmter Sängerinnen von Elisabeth Mara bis Maria Callas* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 2002); Brunel, ‘Diva’, in *Dix mythes au féminin*, ed. Pierre Brunel (Paris: Mazonneuve, 1999), pp.199-210.

<sup>85</sup> Reich, p.130.

<sup>86</sup> See Rieger, *Frau und Musik*, pp.30 ff.

into the singing business. For financial reasons, many of them occupied the double function of performer and music teacher, a situation the writer Sophie Ulliac presents very accurately in her novella *Emmeline*.<sup>87</sup> There were few formal training facilities for them, apart from the Paris Conservatoire which opened in 1795, or regional singing schools, such as the Leipzig school founded by Johann Hiller in 1771 in an attempt to oppose women's exclusion from church choral singing, and whose noteworthy students include Nina d'Aubigny, La Mara and Corona Schröter.<sup>88</sup>

Music education in a transitional France between the Revolution and the July Monarchy appears as 'une très grande anarchie'.<sup>89</sup> The lack of formal education paired with the general debarring of women from the then-existing music schools made the singing career accessible only to girls from wealthy families who were willing to pay for private tuition as the only access to music education: 'Naturellement, les jeunes filles en étaient a priori exclues: il n'existait alors pas pour ces dernières d'autres possibilités de recevoir un enseignement musical que le recours à un maître particulier'.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, the ever-increasing vogue of opera and vocal music demanded professionally trained women singers. As the first national music school for boys *and* girls, the Paris Conservatoire made regular musical education accessible to women: voice studies, and to a lesser extent instruments and composition.<sup>91</sup> Yet some scholars consider the lack of a formal, mandatory education for women musicians an advantage, as the system of private

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<sup>87</sup> See chapter 7. Rieger describes this grey area of female music education and professionalism as a 'berufliches Proletariat' (*Frau und Musik*, p.26). Yet this is not the most popular motif in the majority of literary texts which focus on the singer and her struggles instead of the more banal aspects of professional musicality.

<sup>88</sup> Tick, p.525; Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp.48-49. Later conservatoires include those in Prague (1811), Vienna (1817) and Leipzig (1843). The first institutionalized music programme for women started at Prague Conservatoire in 1815 (see Hoffmann, 'Institutionelle Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten', p.78).

<sup>89</sup> Jean Mongrédien, *La Musique en France, des Lumières au Romantisme, 1789-1830* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), p.11.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.12. Between 1795 and 1798, the pianist and composer, Hélène Montgeroult occupied the post of piano tutor with the same salary as her male counterparts, which was exceptional for the time (ibid., p.18). On subjects open to female students, see Reich, pp.134-36.



tuition and musical apprenticeship made it easier for women to gain access to the business.<sup>92</sup>

Yet if most women received basic tuition in compliance with the ideals of musical domesticity, even women of musical families struggled for professionalism: growing up as the daughter of the García family may have made the career choice more obvious, but the notable case of Fanny Mendelssohn illustrates the struggle between artistic vocation and fatherly expectations.<sup>93</sup> Although scholarship has shown that the boundaries between private and public performance became blurred,<sup>94</sup> and that many singers did build careers either in the salons or on stage, the stigma of the professional woman performer persisted. Even the Romantic icon Maria Malibran assessed her social status with disillusionment: ‘I am merely the opera singer – nothing more – the slave whom they pay to minister to their pleasure’.<sup>95</sup> Performing in an upper-class or royal context had been a privilege for musicians of both sexes, and the sought-after status of court musician offered women singers financial security, relative artistic freedom and a respected status. But the evolution of professional musicianship together with gender and music ideals deepened the divide between professional singers and their dilettante counterparts at home, as they polarized the image of the singer against the background of middle-class tastes and aesthetics. There was doubtless room for great singers and female artistic genius, especially towards the 1840s, yet at a time where the image of the singer peaked, so did the ambiguity surrounding female song. Regardless of all the admiration that especially later high-profile singers received for their performances on stage, the very nature of the singer continued to be perceived as that of a ‘public’ woman who openly displayed her body and voice to a paying audience. Music journals, which greatly contributed to the formation of

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<sup>92</sup> See Hoffmann, ‘Institutionelle Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten’, pp.78/79. It is important to remember that most great women musicians, until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century received no conservatoire education at all.

<sup>93</sup> See n.61. Other well-known cases include Clara Schumann and, earlier, Cornelia Goethe, Marie Diderot and Nannerl Mozart. This further illustrates that singers, pianists, and composers all faced similar obstacles as professional women artists.

<sup>94</sup> Tunley, *Music in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Salon*, pp.12 ff.

<sup>95</sup> The Comtesse de Merlin describes the proud diva as ‘tearful’ and ‘painfully mortified’ by the social divide between rank and talent: ‘She already felt grievously annoyed by the conviction that if she was received in society, it was only on account of her talent’ (*Memoirs of Madame Malibran*, pp. 92-93).

the singer myth, were surprisingly unclear on this matter, often displaying the stereotypical mixture of praise and criticism towards the singer, whom they reviewed along the lines of song ideals, as well as the eroticism of the female body.<sup>96</sup>

A brief glance at terminology further emphasizes the somewhat unclear view of the woman performer: was she regarded as a musician, a singer, an actress, or perhaps even a dancer? Or did she occasionally stand above such simplistic terms because of her genius, which marked her as 'different'? Interestingly, the differentiation between the various professions and relevant terms is not always clear, even less so since many women artists exercised several professions and needed artistic versatility in order to succeed. The terms *actrice* and *Schauspielerin*, very often referred to singers, but carried the connotation of stage performer (in operas and plays), whereas the nobler term of *musicienne/Musikerin* applied instead to concert performers.<sup>97</sup> In France, the *fille d'opéra* situated the female artist within the immoral, low class of the *Demi-monde*,<sup>98</sup> and would perhaps have been the equivalent of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century showgirl with a rich patron. In the German-speaking countries, the *Harfenmädchen* could either be situated among the dilettantes or the morally doubtful group of wandering street musicians, but she was also a very important part of folklore, fairy tales and popular culture. Yet even later, terms paying homage to the grand names of song, like the terms *prima donna*, *divina* and *diva (assoluta)* did not eclipse the ambiguity associated with the nature of the singer persona herself.

Singers remained archetypal negotiators of private and public femininity, yet their stage performance was indissociably linked to the dubious world of theatre, to actresses and entertainers of no moral values. The thought of her daughter aspiring to a career as 'une actrice' was enough to throw a respectable mother into despair – yet we also find the opposite scenario in literature, namely pushy mothers or fathers

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<sup>96</sup> See for example Anon (possibly Horstig), 'Über Herrn und Madame Lear, Bückeburg', *AMZ*, 1.6 (07.11.1798), pp.91-93; Paul Scudo, *Critique et littérature musicales: Première et deuxième séries*. Préface de François Lesure (Genève: Minkoff, 1986).

<sup>97</sup> See Arthur, pp.71/72; Marian Smith, 'Poésie lyrique' and 'Chorégraphie' at the Opéra in the July Monarchy', *COJ*, 4.1 (March 1992), 1-19.

<sup>98</sup> See Tili Boon, 'Women Performing Music: Staging a Social Protest', *WFS*, 8 (2000), 40-54 (pp.42/51).



who drill their daughters for stage fame at any prize, without shying away from immoral means, like selling their daughter to a rich patron.<sup>99</sup>

Certainly, a young man from a middle-class background faced similar obstacles if planning to become a singer – the genre of the artist novel would be unthinkable without its central conflict of a well-educated man wandering off the straight-and-narrow onto the artistic path. But not only was it much easier for a man to train properly as a musician, he was also unlikely to receive the stigma of ‘public man’, or ‘prostitute’, and the problem of physical, public performance did not affect him in the same manner as a woman.<sup>100</sup> Rather, the typical conflict of the male artist, often a virtuoso/composer but rarely an opera singer, is that of the individual genius at odds with society, or of the artist unable to transpose his ideal love into reality. Although the question of female genius and artist love is part of the literary motif, the singer, before facing her artistic conflicts, has to address the moral stakes, much higher for her than for a male musician.

The most professional, accomplished singers struggled with common perceptions of a woman’s respectability and the constant negotiations between their own artistic vocation and the limits and expectations placed upon them by society. The double workload they dealt with as working musicians and wives and mothers at home often proved to be the insurmountable double bind of the woman-artist,<sup>101</sup> while, at any given moment, the singer was an object for the male gaze and intellectual discourse and for a patriarchal society which scrutinized woman *and* artist, and was quick to criticize. Not surprisingly, many artists had to choose between career and family life. Idolized and admired, the woman singer was nevertheless considered a generally immoral woman, as she was ‘free’ in every sense of the word, belonging, as a fantasy, to her audience. Upon her marriage, passing over into the household of her husband as a wife and future mother, the singer in most cases ended her career and ceased to perform in public. But until then, she was a female ‘on the loose’,

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<sup>99</sup> This is the heroine’s dilemma in Charrière’s *Caliste*, Taunay’s *Une Cantatrice* and Desbordes-Valmore’s *Domenica* (see chapter 7).

<sup>100</sup> Though apparently, class mattered for men, too. Tunley cites the case of Dr. Orfila who, conscious of his social status, only performed in the safety of his own salon (*Music in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Salon*, p.14).

<sup>101</sup> In the words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, this would translate as ‘Woman and artist – either incomplete’ (*Aurora Leigh*, II, p.38).

living outside the rules of society, projecting an idealized, yet at the same time sexualized image of the female body and voice.<sup>102</sup>

One may of course argue that the singer's freedom implied possibilities of artistic fulfilment and financial as well as personal rewards. Despite the difficulties and compromises in reality, many singers seem to have enjoyed their careers as much as the image they embodied. The etymology, evolution and innuendos of the terms 'diva' and 'prima donna' bear witness to the potential for both freedom and fantasy that the figure of the singer contained at all times. Society's biased feelings towards women performing in public certainly contributed to both sides of female song, the flamboyant embodiment through the opera diva, and her more demure counterpart, the lied recitalist.<sup>103</sup>

From real-life performance to the written page, the singer continues to navigate between very diverging, polemic ideals relating to woman and music, yet in the literary realm, we will see how far the singer liberalized artistic discourse and offered an alternative space beyond real-life implications and theoretical dogmas in which she evolved as a truly unique character and creation of her author.

The case of women writers is interesting to observe: quite a few of them delivered an account of their musical studies, which never surpassed a certain level of proficiency or ceased upon marriage. Germaine de Staël, Bettina von Arnim, Johanna Schopenhauer and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore were all gifted and skilled artists, composers, singers or even actresses – yet they are today remembered for their literary legacy and not for having had a career on stage. A forerunner to German Romantics, Sophie LaRoche studied music from an early age, yet ceased to perform at the age of 19 and became a novelist who, like many of her time, wrote about musical-literary aesthetics and performance.<sup>104</sup> It would be exaggerated to claim that any of these women missed out on an important career path, or that being a singer would have meant the utmost freedom for their artistic aspirations, while their literary careers were merely compromises. Like the aristocratic dilettantes mentioned earlier, these women were often simply 'too well-bred' to earn their

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<sup>102</sup> Rieger, *Frau und Musik*, pp.28-31.

<sup>103</sup> See Citron, 'Women and the Lied', pp.227f.

<sup>104</sup> LaRoche is known for publishing the art and literary journal *Pomona*, in which she herself wrote the treatises 'Über das Tanzen', 'Über die Musik' and 'An eine musikalische Freundin' (all 1783/1784). See Düll, *Frau und Musik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, pp.95-113.



living on stage – even though for some, the thought may have developed into a minor existential crisis.

In comparison, male authors faced different, but similar issues when negotiating their ‘artistic calling’. Goethe’s and Hoffmann’s struggles in their respective bourgeois cages are well-documented, as is Berlioz’ bitter life as a musician whom his father had wanted to become a doctor. The distinction that needs to be made here for authors both male and female is that to a certain extent, performing music and writing about it belonged to different realms in terms of professionalism, aesthetics and socio-cultural acceptance. In that regard, writing the woman singer (or writing music and musicians in general) reflects crucially on the inherent conflict of the character, as an embodiment of socio-cultural ideals and norms, between musical philosophy and pragmatics.

If in the next chapter we look at the musical aesthetics of the period, it must further lead us to question the discrepancy between a musical culture and literature perceived as *feminised* and the reinforced ideals of domestic femininity and musical dilettantism, as well as the discrepancy between the ideal of song as a sublime poetic force and its performing body perceived as immoral femininity. Women did not stop singing, on the contrary, we can trace the rise of the professional singer in literary texts very clearly - yet the idealisation of the singer, the re-evaluation of the feminine soul as beautifully musical and its ideological counterpart of *feminised music* added a new twist and controversy to the topic of female artistic empowerment and its consequent representation in literature.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Conceptualising Female Song:** **18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Musical-Literary Aesthetics**

In the last chapter I discussed the implications of the singer within the context of contemporary musical culture, and her importance as a socio-cultural archetype between ideal and performance, marked by the ambiguity associated with both woman and music. I shall now take a closer look at the conceptualization of singer and song in the musical-literary discourse of the period and discuss the aesthetic environment from which authors' preoccupation with music developed and from which the singer as a motif in fiction grew. How is the socio-cultural imagery of singer, song and musical practice reflected aesthetically and how does this reality of literature resonate within the literary discourse itself? How did authors reflect upon music in general, and on the singer in particular, responding to the dichotomy between female music as a perceived musical and feminine ideal and the question of the female performer?

As I explained in the last chapter, the discourse on musical aesthetics was rooted in middle- and upper-class musical culture, conceptualized by intellectuals who were usually not professional musicians. The ideal of music and its representative figures was developed in a striking musical-literary discourse illustrating the authors' fascination with both the reality and the philosophy of music. Literature focussed strongly on music through its portrayal of musical themes and treatment of central questions concerning musical aesthetics, artistic genius and the artist in society, or the imagery of poetry-song. However, one has to treat the musical-literary discourse and its blend of musical and feminine ideals with caution. The added discrepancy between making music and conceptualising it intellectually leads us to question further the literary experience of music, and authors' potential idealization and stylisation of singer and song as part of their poetics. Against the broader background of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century discourse, the ideal of female song



prompts the paradigmatic question of the compatibility between ideal and reality of music and woman – a discrepancy between (biological) *femaleness* and (aesthetic) *femininity* which Schlegel discusses thus: ‘Die Frauen werden in der Poesie ebenso ungerecht behandelt, wie im Leben. Die weiblichen sind nicht idealisch, und die idealischen sind nicht weiblich.’<sup>105</sup> This central problem of the ideal implied by the musical feminine stands at the core of this chapter, as I will discuss musical aesthetics, their relevance for singer and song and reflection in the literary discourse.

The aesthetics of the time reflected the ‘feminisation’ of musical culture in that they conceptualized music and song by using a feminised imagery and, theoretically at least, put women and feminine qualities on a pedestal, together with ‘sublime’ music and song. Yet to what extent such feminised musical-literary aesthetics constituted a genuine statement of female artistic agency, both in real life and in literature, remains to be critically addressed here. Although musical concepts were couched in feminine imagery, as were the fantasy of song and singer, they were also marked by misogyny and the long-held view of women’s physical, intellectual, and consequently artistic inferiority. As a largely instinctive, unprofessional keeper and practitioner of song, a woman was considered a musical helper rather than a musical genius. This imagery is aptly reflected in the simplistic imagery of musical culture, as well as in the evolution of the Romantic muse who, in contrast to her Greek namesake, was capable only of fulfilling an inspirational role to the male composer or poet.<sup>106</sup> Although a woman was considered ‘musical’ in herself, she faced serious ideological obstacles in her claim for musicianship and musical genius, a paradoxical ideology largely due to Rousseau’s aesthetics and influence on French and German thought. It was the Rousseauesque statement on natural music unspoilt by civilization and the performing arts industry, and its link with the feminine that determined the imagery of female musicality for a long time.

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<sup>105</sup> *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958-), II.1, p.172 (hereafter *KFSA*).

<sup>106</sup> The muse figure underwent a significant development throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from inspirational, quasi-angelic helper of art to a ‘muse malade’ (to use Baudelairean terms), a femme fatale cipher of decadence and fin de siècle aesthetics. See for example José-Luis Diaz, ‘Avatars de la Muse à l’époque romantique’, in *Masculin-féminin dans la poésie et les poétiques du XIXe siècle*, ed. Christine Planté (Lyon: PUL, 2002), pp.121-36 (pp.134f.); Serge Zenkine, ‘La “Muse romantique” et son corps’, in *Masculin-féminin*, pp.151-62.

## Finding the Original Language: Musical Aesthetics and the Rousseauesque Tradition

What makes the musical discourse in literature of the time so fascinating is the intimate link that writers perceived between music and language, and the way they tried to appropriate the very essence of music in their texts – to use Novalis's words, literature's ideal consisted in the attempt '*bestimmt durch Musik zu sprechen*'.<sup>107</sup> Theories and concepts on the relationship between music and language (and in extension literature) were not new,<sup>108</sup> but it was through Rousseau's writings and the developments of an aesthetics of sensibility and introspection in France and Germany throughout the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the link between music and words became more important and that the imagery of music as a complementary, *other* language occupied a central place in musical-literary discourse. In his *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*,<sup>109</sup> Rousseau made the first noteworthy claim of the likeness of human speech and music:

Avec les premières voix se formèrent les premières articulations ou les premiers sons, selon le genre de la passion qui dictait les uns ou les autres. La colère arrache des cris menaçants que la langue et le palais articulent: mais la voix de la tendresse est plus douce, c'est la glotte qui la modifie, et cette voix devient un son; [...] ainsi les vers, les chants, la parole, ont une origine commune. Autour des fontaines dont j'ai parlé, les premiers discours furent les premières chansons: les retours périodiques et mesurés du rythme, les inflexions mélodieuses des accents, firent naître la poésie et la musique avec la langue.<sup>110</sup>

Though he was not the only author to conceptualize music and speech, Rousseau proved crucial for 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought in that he established the firm paradigm of music as a natural, unspoiled form of human expression, ascribing a particular nature, texture, body and emotivity to the musical language as the vague

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<sup>107</sup> Novalis, *Allgemeines Brouillon* no.245, Schriften III, pp.283-284.

<sup>108</sup> See Head, 'Birdsong and the Origins of Music', *JRM*, 122.1 (1997), 1-23; Didier, *La Musique des Lumières*, pp.111-27; Downing Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp.34-56.

<sup>109</sup> The *Essai* was published posthumously in 1781, but had been conceptualized in different variations from the 1750s onwards, starting with his *Lettre sur la musique française* and his attack on Rameau and French singing. See Jean Starobinski's introduction in *Œuvres* V, pp.CLXV-CCIV.

<sup>110</sup> *Œuvres* V, p.410. Pre-Rousseauesque thought understood music in mathematical, rational terms, less as an expression of the human heart and soul than a 'géométrie musicale' (Jamain, pp.67-69). Rousseau's musical imagery must obviously also be seen in the light of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical disputes and the author's preference of Italian over French music (see *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, p.185).



memory of pre-social harmony – a harmony whose seat Rousseau firmly places within the human soul and heart, thus breaking with the previously-held Pythagorean concepts of musical mechanics. Music as the better language and the language of human sensitivity and poetics constitutes one of the central paradigms of musical-literary discourse of the time, which subsequent authors embraced and rewrote, developing the various implications of the mythical union between music and language:

Je me perdais dans ces sentiments indécis que fait naître la musique, art qui tient le milieu entre la nature matérielle et la nature intellectuelle, qui peut dépouiller l'amour de son enveloppe terrestre et donner un corps à l'ange du ciel. Selon les dispositions de celui qui les écoute, ces mélodies sont des pensées ou des caresses.<sup>111</sup>

In this account of his personal musical experience, Chateaubriand adopts the musical aesthetics of his time, identifying music as a poetic experience blending the terrestrial with the divine. Though he does not specify it, we may assume that Chateaubriand attributes the rational effect of music to a male listener, and the emotional effect to a female listener, which would be consistent with Rousseauesque concepts of music and woman, as we will see further on. What is striking here is that, like so many authors of the time, Chateaubriand conceptualizes music as the 'other' language, capable of transcending human existence and linking matter with spirit, earth with heaven. Music becomes synonymous with a higher reality, a heightened form of speech and sublimated, transcendent form of human expression, while at the same time, in Rousseauesque aesthetics, it remains an originally truthful, inherent part of humanity. This thought becomes apparent in the sentimentalist literary traditions and revival of the pastoral genre in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, where the idea of an ideal human state in harmony with nature is expressed through music and the figure of the shepherd. Among the many authors to rewrite the paradigm of such 'natural' human music, Sophie LaRoche affirms that 'ich stelle mir vor, dass die ersten Tänzer und Sänger gesunde, unschuldsvolle Kinder waren, die zwischen den Schafen, mit denen sie erzogen wurden, froh herumhüpften, und

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<sup>111</sup> Unpublished fragment, here cited in Anatole Feugère, 'Fragments inédits des Mémoires d'Outre-tombe', *RHL*, 16.3, p.589.

den Gesang der Vögel nachzuahmen suchten'.<sup>112</sup> Not surprisingly, LaRoche's heroine Sophie von Sternheim is such an unspoiled musician: Urged to perform at court, Sophie escapes her misery by singing sentimental songs, full of nostalgia for the 'lost' simple life, to help her cope with the decadence of court life. Truly Rousseauesque, Sophie hates to perform operatic arias; by dramatizing the artificiality of the performance as well as Sophie's sexualized singing body, the author also implicitly criticizes the inappropriate male gaze on the singer, and the misuse of song in the wrong environment.<sup>113</sup> This ideal of simple song and of music as a signifier for an original, idealised, and therefore lost state of humanity can be found throughout texts of the period, and well into the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – even the divas of July-Monarchy narratives still long for that simple tune, synonymous of lost happiness, simple harmony, and often love.<sup>114</sup> Most authors draw on the analogy of music, nature and song as a heightened form of human expression, in reminiscence of the antique model of lyrical poetry, but also through the new, Rousseauesque imagery of music as the other language. The paradox of the human melody is both its simplicity and its sublime elusiveness – the dilemma of ever finding and owning the musical genius that is felt within one's soul and heart. Especially later Romantics draw on the image of the 'unattainable' language within oneself, the ideal of poetry, embodied through the human instrument: 'Je n'ai encore entendu que les premiers accents de la mélodie qui est peut-être en moi. Cet instrument va bientôt tomber en poussières, je n'ai pu que l'accorder, mais avec délices!'<sup>115</sup> This paradigm of the musician and singer who appears 'natural', that is unspoiled and simple, yet who is capable of expressing the ideal of musical genius and sublimity, appears more complex than the basic ideal of the untrained singer would at first suggest – Mignon for example is a representative of simple, untrained and unspoiled song, but she is at the same time one of the most enigmatic and complex characters and figures of musical genius in literature, as we shall see in the following chapter.

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<sup>112</sup> LaRoche, *Pomona*, 1.2 (1783), pp.184-202. Jamain succinctly remarks that 'L'homme qui chante devient berger' (p.206). Dance and song are considered equal forms of expression of the musical self. See chapter 4, n.34.

<sup>113</sup> LaRoche, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, p.42; 208-209.

<sup>114</sup> We find dramatizations of the 'simple song' in Fischer, Thellusson, Ulliac, Hoffmann and Balzac, among others.

<sup>115</sup> Musset, *Œuvres complètes en prose*, ed. Maurice Allem (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p.328.



In Rousseau's wake, the ideal of song as heightened human expression featured prominently in intellectual discourse, as authors intensified the link between song and the innermost self, the soul and the heart, and thus the image of the voice as the most human and most sublime instrument of all.<sup>116</sup> Hegel articulated his thoughts around the concept of the 'tönende Seele',<sup>117</sup> in which he saw the quintessence of musical human expression.<sup>118</sup> Most German authors, such as Novalis and Hoffmann, ascribe to music the status of a sublimated *proto-* or *meta-language*, capable of expressing everything, yet beyond the grasp of language, and transcending human expression.<sup>119</sup> On the French side, both Germaine de Staël and Chateaubriand, as well as the later generations of Romantics, conceptualized music as a quasi-religious elevation of the individual, as a vehicle of human emotions and man's divine inner self. The human voice appears as the perfect instrument and expression of an original (musical) language,<sup>120</sup> of poetry beyond language and reason, echoing an ideal state of original humanity as well as a 'sentiment de l'infini'.<sup>121</sup> Especially Madame de Staël, as mediator between French and German thought, articulated her views on music in *De l'Allemagne*, as a blend of her Rousseauesque heritage and her new impressions of German aesthetics. Music as the better language also became increasingly *absolute*, i.e. it was considered a sublime, autonomous entity independent from outer reality and from the constraints of spoken or written language.<sup>122</sup> Yet this specific concept of absolute music (which determined later music aesthetics) was first formulated by the *literary* discourse which thus set up the paradigm of music as the 'other' language, and eventually as an art form which no longer required spoken language. However, song as a quintessential genre of the

<sup>116</sup> 'La voix est sans contredit le plus beau des instruments; la musique vocale la plus belle musique' (Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, IX, p.201).

<sup>117</sup> 'Zugleich läßt die menschliche Stimme sich als das Tönen der Seele selbst vernehmen' (*Ästhetik*, II, p.291). And further down: 'Im Gesang aber ist es ihr eigener Leib, aus welchem die Seele herausklingt' (p.291).

<sup>118</sup> Other theorists similarly regard singing as a 'Vervollkommnung sowohl der Dichtkunst als auch der Musik' and as the language of the heart (Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, II, pp.460-61; 1075); Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister*, pp.94-99; 133-60; Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, pp.335-43. Schubart explicitly situates musical genius within the heart (p.368).

<sup>119</sup> Goethe remarks that '[Die Musik] ist ganz Form und Gehalt und erhöht und veredelt alles, was sie ausdrückt'. *Maximen und Reflexionen* (HA XII, p.473). See my case study on Hoffmann in chapter 6.

<sup>120</sup> Schubart, p.335.

<sup>121</sup> *De l'Allemagne*, ed. Comtesse Jean de Pange and Simone Balayé, 5 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1958-1960), III, p.376 (hereafter *DA*).

<sup>122</sup> See Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*.

time was crucial since it carried the double significance of music as an absolute, sublime language, and also that of an accessible, popular performance. Vocal music linked the more abstract, ideal side of musical aesthetics, of the Rousseauesque ideal, with the very pragmatic, almost banal side of musical culture, also embodied by the imagery of the woman singer.

This ideal of human speech as song (and vice versa) makes the writing of music in the literary discourse highly fascinating, since authors embraced the paradox of ‘writing’ music so passionately, treating song as a carrier of the sublime, ineffable music, yet also as a very graspable expression of the sublime through the image of song and singer.

The second paradigm established through Rousseauesque song aesthetics is the problematic link between music and woman. As the above *Essai* quotation shows, he accentuated the intimate link not only between music and language, but also between music and emotion, and ultimately, between music and femininity as opposed to speech, which he marks as a male preserve. Identifying speech as being engendered by violent emotions, whereas music and harmonious sounds are the products of tender emotions, Rousseau reaffirms the paradigmatic triangle of music, emotion and femininity, setting it apart from male reason and speech.

La mélodie, en imitant les inflexions de la voix, exprime les plaints, les cris de la douleur ou de joie, les menaces, les gémissements; tous les signes vocaux des passions sont de son ressort. Elle imite les accents des langues, et les tours affectés dans chaque idiome à certains mouvements de l’âme: elle n’imite pas seulement, elle parle; et son langage inarticulé, mais vif, ardent, passionné a cent fois plus d’énergie que la parole même. Voilà d’où naît la force des imitations musicales; voilà d’où naît l’empire du chant sur les cœurs sensibles.<sup>123</sup>

Although Rousseau was not the first to link the realm of music implicitly to emotion and to the female psyche, his view on female nature and on the world of professional performers was influential. It is in Rousseau’s wake that the ‘natural’ woman singing a simple tune became a literary cliché, and that the dichotomy between the ‘natural’, unspoiled singer and the professional performer increased. The musical-literary discourse did not simply poeticize music and song, but also reprised the long-established underlying uncanniness of music which, at the far end

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<sup>123</sup> *Œuvres*, V, p.416.



of musical sublimity, had always contained a latent threat to social order. A double-edged sword since antiquity, music belonged to the realm of emotion, irrationality and nature, and so did woman, which creates the problematic paradigm of woman-music as a potential threat that needs to be contained. The sublime song was also an erotically charged, dangerous song:

Quant à la musique, je la regarde comme le véhicule de toutes les passions. Les sons entrent dans l'âme mieux que les paroles, et je pense que la sagesse d'une femme a de la peine à chanter un air tendre sans en sentir l'effet et sans en faire l'application à un objet particulier, lorsqu'il se rencontre.<sup>124</sup>

Another variation of the long-established ambivalent attitude towards female musicality, the dangerous music lesson as seduction had been a classic scenario in European literature since at least Molière: a well-bred young girl receives music tuition from a handsome teacher and is constantly in danger of succumbing to the charms of both teacher and music. As I outlined earlier, female nature was considered weak and unsuitable for study. But musical education was not just considered unnecessary for women, it was considered harmful, and what is more, the imagery of musical education bore strong frivolous connotations, usually opposing the vigilant mother with her daughter and the dangerous seductor-teacher.<sup>125</sup> Music, though part of female nature, was potentially dangerous, which refers back to the general imagery of female nature as a threat to male order, and the archetype of the siren and her male listener. Unleashing both music and woman by bringing them together in the context of physical love constituted a powerful, quasi-anarchic imagery. Depending on the point of view, the sexual charge of woman-music could take on various shapes: the rapture that two lovers experience through music was just as typical as a play with voyeurism and the male gaze on a woman's eroticized singing body, as shown in Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* (1772) or Heinse's *Hildegard von Hohenthal* (1794). The emotional and erotic qualities of

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<sup>124</sup> *Lettres inédites de la Marquise de Créqui à Sénac de Meilhan, 1782-1798* (Paris: Potier, 1856), cit. in Anne Mooij, *Caractères principaux et tendances des romans psychologiques chez quelques femmes-auteurs, de Madame Riccoboni à Madame De Souza: (1757-1826)* (Groningen: Drukkerij de Waal, 1949), p.22; See also Sulzer, p.461; Thomas, pp.145-49.

<sup>125</sup> See Delon, 'La Musique dans le roman', pp.23-36. Educators like Mlle Lespinasse recommended that music lessons should always be monitored by a parent (Mooij, pp.19f).

song were both situated in a feminine cosmos and attributed to female art practice; both the soprano, idealizing the ethereal sound of the high voice, and the alto, her more sensual counterpart, fuelled the ambiguous imagery of the female song between ideal and performance, heightened speech and dangerous femininity.

Rousseau's views on the 'natural' woman were furthered by his general criticism of civilisation. Favouring the man and woman of nature, his concept of song and language referred to an originally *intact* form of expression which, around the time he wrote his treatise, he considered to be lost by society. Song should be the voice of nature, but it had in fact ceased to be a 'natural', and thus a moral art form:

Voilà comment le chant devint, par degrés, un art entièrement séparé de la parole dont il tire son origine; comment les harmoniques des sons firent oublier les inflexions de la voix; et comment enfin, bornée à l'effet purement physique du concours des vibrations, la musique se trouva privée des effets moraux qu'elle avait produits quand elle était doublement la voix de la nature.<sup>126</sup>

Rousseau clearly separates the ideal of song and language as an original, worthy human expression in a pre-social state, from its perversion through a decadent performance culture, embodied by performers, theatre people and especially women singers.<sup>127</sup> Not only did Rousseau stress the unspoiled, sublime and emotional character of music, furthering its allure of femininity (and women's need to remain true to their simple, emotional nature), but we can see the clear discrepancy in his thought between the ideal of song and femininity, and the reality of performance and womanhood. Both *Émile* (1762) and the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1757) show his contempt for contemporary, 'degenerate' art practice as well as educated, artistic women, a verdict that perpetuated and exacerbated the central rift between woman as a symbol of ideal song and woman as a professional performer.<sup>128</sup> Not surprisingly, Rousseau evokes the ideal of song in his *Essai* simultaneously with the

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<sup>126</sup> *Œuvres* V, p.427.

<sup>127</sup> In his *Dictionnaire de Musique*, Rousseau differentiates between the ancient, ideal poet-musician in the image of Orpheus and contemporary, idle performers (*Œuvres* V, p.915).

<sup>128</sup> In his *Lettre*, Rousseau explicitly links moral and social decadence with women performing in public: 'Je demande comment un état dont l'unique objet est de se montrer au public, et qui pis est, de se montrer pour de l'argent, conviendrait à d'honnêtes femmes, et pourrait compatir en elles avec la modestie et les bonnes mœurs' (*Œuvres* V, pp.82f). Yet again, Rousseau concedes the odd exception: He often cites the actress and singer Marie Fel (1713-1794) as an example of vocal perfection. In his *Dictionnaire*, he pleads for more variety in women's voices, inspired by the Contralti that impressed him in Italy (*Œuvres* V, p.1151).



dangerous side of music, that of pleasure and amorous rapture. In a scenario evoking man's fall and original sin, Rousseau describes the first people as having emerged through song and amorous passion.<sup>129</sup> In consequence, Rousseau's concept of original, pre-social, and therefore 'lost' song has little to do with the figure of the actual woman singer, whom he rejects completely as an indecent, perverted figure.

The paradox of female song lies in this paradigmatic Rousseauesque ontology: by its very nature, music belongs to femininity, expressing an ideal of sublimity; yet the woman who sings (in the professional sense) appears to be the exact opposite of the musical ideal, since she is regarded as perverted in her very nature.<sup>130</sup> Hence the paradoxical nature of song imagery: although song seems to address qualities that are ascribed to woman, such as intimacy, nature and emotion, the song ideal excludes woman as an actual song performer, as someone who puts the ideal of song into practice, sharing her innermost with an audience and performing femininity that should be confined to the home exclusively. In other words: 'true' song in its aesthetic conceptualization can never have a female performing body, which appears irreconcilable with musical sublimity and genius.

Be that as it may, literature responded strongly to Rousseauesque aesthetics of song as the sublime *other* language and lost ideal. Although Rousseau strictly dissociated the song ideal from the woman performer, authors were quite attuned to both and continued to conceptualize these two antagonistic sides of female song. In the following, we will take a brief look at key paradigms of the literary treatment of female song.

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<sup>129</sup> *Œuvres* V, pp.402-405.

<sup>130</sup> This view resonates in later concepts of the gendered character (see pp.27-32). See also Claudia Honegger, *Die Ordnung der Geschlechter* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1991), p.42.

## Literary Concepts of the Woman Singer

‘Ah! Ma Julie, qu’ai-je entendu? Quels sons touchants? quelle musique? quelle source délicieuse de sentiments et de plaisirs?’<sup>131</sup>

If we are to follow Rousseau’s thoughts, the only true embodiment of female song could be the ‘natural’, simple singer in the image of Émile’s Sophie, a decent, virginal girl who sings pleasing tunes that conform both to Rousseau’s moral standards regarding women and his ideal of song as the original, unspoilt harmony of humankind. Rousseau’s singer would not be trained to perform in public but, excluded from artistic agency or genius, would only perform in the context of the home, for instance as a mother singing to her children, or beautifying a domestic evening, the only legitimate song contexts where the latent threat emanating from female musicality would be contained and a careful balance between the celestial and the carnal side of woman-music established. Rousseau’s views did certainly not coincide with the real-life situation of singers, nor did writers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century write the singer alongside such rigid lines. The paradox of literature in fact arises from the importance of Rousseauesque music aesthetics for writers who drew on the image of song as sublime, feminised otherness, thus theoretically relegating the woman singer to the realm of artistic redundancy and female passivity. The stereotypical muse character would doubtlessly fit this category.

Writing in Rousseau’s wake, most authors perpetuated the imagery of woman as ‘naturally musical’: ‘Die Frau [...] ist ganz Herz, und ihre Ohren sind Herz-Ohren’.<sup>132</sup> Jean Paul famously affirmed that ‘die Musik – die singende und die spielende – gehört der weiblichen Seele zu’,<sup>133</sup> whereas Caroline de la Motte Fouqué considered music to be the art-form best suited for women in that it best represents female nature:

So ist die Musik, selbst mit Pretention getrieben, immer noch das Element, in welchem sich das Wesen der Frau am freiesten, am naturgemähesten

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<sup>131</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou, La nouvelle Héloïse*, ed. Henri Coulet (Paris: Gallimard 1993), p.181.

<sup>132</sup> Jean Paul, *Levana, Werke V*, p.695.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.713-14.



zurückspiegelt; ja, Beide sind so sehr Eins, dass [...] die ursprüngliche Harmonie sich stets auf rührende, ahnungsvolle Weise herausfühlt.<sup>134</sup>

While Jean Paul, consistent with the paradigm of the human instrument, describes music as part of a woman's soul, Caroline de la Motte Fouqué uses the Rousseauesque key notions of 'natural' music and original harmony which are truthful, unspoiled expressions of female nature, thus aligning woman and music. In this she echoes contemporary musical and gender ideals, especially Humboldt's *Geschlechtscharakter*,<sup>135</sup> according to which music and woman possessed inalterable qualities. Evading the question of musical agency, Caroline de la Motte Fouqué further feminised her vision of transcendence through music by describing a woman's transformation to eternal beauty through music and song:

Und wie sie sich denn mit einemale gleichsam innerlich eröffneten und die göttliche Musik hervorquoll, und sie auf ihren Wellen himmelan trug, schienen sie andre Wesen, völlig unterschieden von dem gewohnten Eindruck ihrer Erscheinung. Sie hätten sich wohl selbst nicht wieder erkannt, so unbewusst verklärt das ewig Schöne.<sup>136</sup>

Fouqué thus rewrites the stereotype of female musical attractiveness, and of music as an intrinsic enhancement of femininity, as affirmed by other theorists as well: 'Wie leicht vergisst man beim schönen Gesang, dass die Sängerin nicht schön ist, und wie leicht kann sie dadurch sich eine ganze Gesellschaft unterwürfig machen?'<sup>137</sup>

Yet, in general, authors appeared attuned to the complexity of female song and its potential for female empowerment, if not controversy and subversion of such key paradigms like female artistic agency, professionalism and genius. The literary treatment of the singer owes its major aesthetic underpinnings to post-Rousseauesque musical-literary discourse. As I have explained before, literature also opens up more interesting, multi-faceted visions of female song performance (and possible empowerment through song) than musical aesthetics and theories on female nature seem to suggest. Though drawing on the above cliché of female

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<sup>134</sup> *Die Frauen in der großen Welt*, *Ausgewählte Werke* III, p.258.

<sup>135</sup> See p.30.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.258.

<sup>137</sup> Sulzer, pp.1077-78.

beautification through song, some texts eventually appropriate this motif in order to accentuate the singer's struggle for emancipation: if the singer's 'ugliness' sabotages her personal happiness, she is literally able to transform herself into the stage performer while singing, and then exude glamour and attractiveness.<sup>138</sup> If this scenario may appear somewhat banal, certain texts, like *Corinne* and *Consuelo* use the musically-induced embellishment and sublimity of the singer very consciously as part of the female artist's empowerment and superiority.

### Writing Otherness

As to the paradigm of female musical otherness, literature responds on different levels. As we shall see in the following case studies, the singer may appear 'naturally' different, as implied by her musical nature, meaning a musical gift she does not need to train, but which is an intrinsic part of her nature as a woman. Yet she may as well appear deliberately (and defiantly) different as an artist – this two-fold difference manifests itself textually, poetically and socially.

Depending on the national and linguistic context of the text, it is rare to find a literary treatment in which the singer appears at home in the socio-cultural context set up in the narrative. Thus, the singer herself and her language appear doubly foreign, as representatives of the other of music, yet also as strangers within the narrative context, usually situated outside the social order. In the newly evolving genres of artist novel/novella and musical prose, which appropriate the other language of music, the singer appears just as hybrid, an unusual female character, usually a foreigner or at least bi-national, 'different' through her parents or upbringing. While in German texts, we usually find an Italian element, French texts introduce singers with a German or Italian heritage. Alternatively, the plot is geographically transposed, usually to Italy. Although this partly alludes to the real-life context of Germany's and Italy's musical dominance, it is also a poetic device within the text to develop the aspect of the singer's difference, as well as her specific status outside social structures and the special status of music. The singer's mixed

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<sup>138</sup> See the case studies in chapter 7.



heritage or mysterious origin often reinforces the complexity of her musical nature and her status as an outsider, socially and poetically. Both singer and song appear foreign and transposed: Goethe specifically situates his child-singer Mignon within the realm of musical-poetic otherness, creating in her a defiant artist who radically distances herself from any social context, by communicating exclusively through song, and whose music evokes the 18<sup>th</sup>– century utopia of the original harmony of song and speech. A similar imagery of otherness applies to Madame de Staël's Corinne, yet in her case the musical-poetic nature of the female artist (that which differentiates her from other women and from men) is much more strongly aligned with the otherness of the woman performer within middle class society as a social stigma; a leitmotif that became more important in subsequent literary treatments of the singer, and which ultimately reunites the two realms of female song that Rousseau kept strictly apart: namely, the sublimity of musical genius through song and women's status as legitimate professional song performers.

Although the singer becomes more professional in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the question of her otherness within society, much like that of her male artist counterpart, becomes predominant, the literary treatment continues to draw on the Rousseauesque ideal of music and song as the other language, as a different level of human existence, both poetically and literally. The stylization of the woman singer within the idea of otherness, and by it the reflection on the status of music, remain a leitmotiv throughout most 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts, which shows to what extent literature, against the backdrop of musical culture and aesthetics, was fascinated by the singer's potential to evoke the sublime as much as the carnal, to carry a higher principle while appearing as a performer in breach of social and artistic norms.

## Sublime Eroticism: Writing the Singing Body

Du singst – und Deine Zauberkehle  
Haucht süße Lust in jedes Herz.  
So singt im Haine Philomele  
Der Liebe Glück und ihren Schmerz.  
Doch hat sie unter dichten Zweigen  
Sich nett ihr Nestchen erst gebaut,  
Fängt sie allmählich an zu schweigen –  
Das Weibchen singt dann keinen Laut.  
Nun fiat applicatio!  
Du singst wie sie; bald schweig auch so.<sup>139</sup>

A great deal of the singer's literary attractiveness stems from the author's need to transpose the experience of song performance onto paper, and to render the singer 'audible' as well as 'visible'. This literary transposition addresses the question of the singer's objectification as much as the author's aesthetics in 'writing' music, while at the same time responding to the dichotomy of song ideal and performing body.

As I have explained in the methodological outline of my thesis, the paradox of 'writing music' is that authors strive to render a foreign principle in a medium which cannot adequately represent it. The writing of female song hence always remains approximate to a certain extent. Other elements, obviously, play a role in the literary stylization of the woman singer as a representative both of musical otherness and as a woman who literally performs 'in public' and puts herself on display. In the light of musical aesthetics, we need to briefly look at the implications of writing the singing body in literature.

Whereas in music criticism we often find a stereotypically misogynist commentary on the singer's appearance alone, without any credit whatsoever given to her musical merit, literature is more diverse in its negotiation of the ambiguity associated with woman-music, playing with the imagery of female song as both a sublime ideal and a sexually charged image of femininity. Especially in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century we encounter both extreme positions, the utter poeticization of song, which sometimes goes hand in hand with the ideal of disembodied song and the sexualisation of the female singing body. Heinse's *Hildegard von Hohenenthal*

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<sup>139</sup> Anon, 'Gedicht ins Stammbuch einer Sängerin', *AMZ*, 2.32 (07.06.1800), p.567.



celebrates the status of the female body as a sensual object to the male gaze. In a voyeuristic scene, the composer Lockmann first sees the singer Hildegard naked while she is bathing<sup>140</sup> – when he later composes for her voice, he equally draws on his impression of the naked singer's body, thus blending the imagery of sublime voice with female sexuality.<sup>141</sup> In *Le Diable Amoureux*, Cazotte employs male voyeurism explicitly in connection with song, rewriting the fantasy of the woman singer as sexualized otherness, and as an intimate act in which the singer literally reveals the most intimate part of herself. Even more subtle treatments, like Goethe's *Werther* or LaRoche's *Sternheim*, still use the dualism of ideal singing voice and sensual singing body to either emphasize or criticize this image of female song. The male protagonist's desire to match a female body to the ethereal, invisible voice that he hears furthers Hoffmann's treatment of the singer Antonie in *Rat Krespel*, and the blatant mismatch between her voice and her body, which are an area of dispute between father, lover and the singer's own quest for absolute artistic freedom. This dualism remains a leitmotiv for later generations of writers, with some very interesting developments in works of the 1830s and 1840s which, at the height of the diva myth, explore very closely the implications of the singer's voice and body and the conflict between the ideals of the singing voice and the reality of the performing body. Even authors disillusioned with Romantic aesthetics, like Berlioz, treat this dichotomy implied in the ideal of woman-music. In his novella *Euphonia*, Berlioz evokes both the celestial image of female song and the carnal fatality of the promiscuous sexual monster within the same singer, who, at the end of the novella, has to be crushed to death by mechanical means.

The literary conceptualization of the singer revolves around the sublime of music, as it does around the sexual charge of the female performing body. Female song as a sexualized female voice had been linked to a woman's fertility since antiquity. A woman's physical characteristics, like the buccal cavity and anatomy of the throat, were believed to be analogous to a woman's womb and vaginal

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<sup>140</sup> Not surprisingly, in Heinse's view of song as a 'Sirenenkunst' (*Sämtliche Werke* V, p.227) we find the stereotypical connection of woman, song and water.

<sup>141</sup> *Sämtliche Werke* V, pp. 7/35/123. See also Caduff, pp.240-41.

passage.<sup>142</sup> Throughout the period in question, the voice was considered a secondary sexual determinant, through which woman was differentiated from man by her smaller larynx and her vocal development during puberty which differed from man – again, this presumed biological fact blended with the philosophical discourse on women’s ‘naturally-given’ physical and intellectual inferiority, as part of the unalterable gendered character. The singer’s performance consumed energy and bodily fluids that were normally needed in her womb, which gave rise to concerns about her physical health, her menstrual cycle, her ability to bear children, and her risk of untimely consumption. Even as late as 1840, Segond admonished celibacy in his *Hygiène du chanteur*, whereas others argued that a woman’s voice improves when she loses her virginity and comes into contact with a man.<sup>143</sup> Again, this dual perception of female song evolved simultaneously. Song was not only the heightened expression of sublimity, but evolved alongside the discourse on women as immoral performers, as well as treatises in biology and anatomy.<sup>144</sup> The ancient image of the voice as a flute evolved to that of the voice as a string instrument, a violin or harp, played through air vibrations that appear, depending on the point of view, as celestial or sexual. Whether viewed as vocal chords, folds, or singing orifice, the voice blends medical, philosophical and literary discourse around a certain type of imagery of song, and specifically of a woman’s song, the latter reuniting so pertinently the sublimity of the muse and of original language with the sensuality of the female body, the disembodied human voice with the male voyeurism directed towards the female singing body. Musical performance as amorous rapture and ecstasy, just like the medical discourse on a singer’s constitution and the dangers of singing, belong to the same imagery of female song. It is in this imagery of the singer’s body on display that we again encounter the

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<sup>142</sup> See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1990), p.36; Nieberle, pp.44-45.

<sup>143</sup> See Janine Neboit-Mombet, ‘Evolution des connaissances sur la voix humaine de 1770 à 1870’, in *La Voix dans la culture et la littérature françaises (1713-1875)*, ed. Jacques Wagner (Clermont-Ferrand: PUBP, 2001), pp.25-34 (pp.29-30).

<sup>144</sup> Although specific voice concepts had been around since Dodart’s *Mémoire sur les causes de la voix de l’homme et de ses différents tons* (1703), anatomical treatises became interesting only towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1741, Ferrein, through posthumous experiments on the larynx, establishes the term ‘vocal chords’ (see Didier, *La Musique*, pp.111-127). However, the imagery and fantasy of the female voice as synonymous with female sexuality was much stronger than de facto medical knowledge, which did not fully explain female biology until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Anderson/Zinsser, II, pp.152f.).



archetypal blend of real-life implications and aesthetic discourse: according to medical manuals of the period, a woman, when singing, reveals the most intimate part of her own body, her vocal folds, ergo her sexual organs.<sup>145</sup> An assumption which blends well with the image of song as pleasure, if not rapture and physical and spiritual ecstasy, as it equally coincides with the period's musical aesthetics, according to which song is the innermost speaking of the human soul.<sup>146</sup> Not surprisingly, many are the warnings issued by doctors who not only criticize the singer's unwomanly demeanour, but warn against the fatal consequences of excessive singing for her health.<sup>147</sup>

This blend of different views on a singer's public performance accounts for extremely interesting literary treatments of the topic, where the negotiation of the public sphere stands as one of the central aspects of the singer. Her performance in public is always also a debate on the context of the song and on the singer's position, not only as an artist, but as a woman within (or outside) society – the singer's performance, her struggle with space, privacy and publicity, takes on an existentialist tone, to the point that the question of the performance practice and space becomes tied to the life and death of the singer. Hoffmann's *Rat Krespel* and Sand's *La Prima donna*, to name but two music novellas, both dramatize this conflict brilliantly.

The double charge of the woman singer, as a fantasy on whom the male subject projects utter poetic transcendence, yet also a performer whose body suggests sensuality and musical rapture seems to lose nothing of its drama as we move along in the individual case studies. Even though the singer becomes more professional and, as we will see in chapters 6 and 7, to a certain extent potentially more trivial, the sensuality of the performer retains the Rousseauesque ideal of music as the other, the better language. Even if the gaze that lingers on the singer constitutes an essential fantasy in literature, as does the performing body, so does the question of song itself, and of the singer as a messenger of something *other*. Writing the singer's body, and responding to the question of the singer's otherness are two essential

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<sup>145</sup> See Laqueur, pp.35-37; Neboit-Mombet, pp.28-30.

<sup>146</sup> See pp.41ff.

<sup>147</sup> See Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp. 54f. Nina d'Aubigny also warns against the fatal consequences of abusive singing, such as training an alto to be a soprano, or excessive training for those with a weak constitution (see Caduff, *Die Literarisierung*, pp.247-49).

literary paradigms, as well as important reflections on post-Rousseauesque musical culture and aesthetics.

### Questions of Life and Death

At the same time, authors dramatize their treatment of the singer by reflecting on such difficult topics as motherhood and personal happiness, and the general conflict of the woman singer who actively defies traditional female stereotypes and life models. As an outsider, the singer often finds herself in stark antagonism to the conventional, socially sanctioned female roles of wife and mother. This is an area that all my case studies touch upon in various ways, and in which they not only reflect upon a very realistic problem, namely the difficulty for professional singers to reconcile a career with their search for love, and the often unattainable ideal of motherhood – but on a more dramatic, yet also poetic level, the singer's position outside social norms, her role as an exception to the rule, a woman who has no access to 'normal' womanhood. A crucial area of dispute in a number of texts, this paradigm is often developed within the singer's psyche and her rapport with her environment, but also very often through the use of a diametrically-opposed pair of female characters that serve to illustrate these two antagonistic models of femininity. In literature, it seems that the singer's status as artistically and personally different excludes the possibility of personal fulfilment in love, marriage and motherhood. In the majority of the case studies treated here, the singer ultimately lives and dies alone, unable to reconcile the two opposing models of womanhood, the *femme fatale* singer and the saintly mother figure. In some cases, the singer, like male artists in literature, deliberately chooses the lonely existence of the artistic genius, perhaps indulging in a concept like the unfulfilled love of the Romantic artist that we often encounter in male artist novels. Rarely does the singer find happiness in love, and then only under the condition which is rather sheepishly expressed in the above poem drawing the parallel between singer and songbird: upon her marriage, the singer must cease all artistic activity, since the bliss of married life and motherhood can only be obtained by female silence. Often enough, the singer's fate is a question



of choice on the part of her male suitor, who, faced with two antagonistic models of femininity, eventually chooses the conventional type for marriage and parenthood or, in the rare case, believes in the singer's moral integrity and finally agrees to marry her. This, however, is extremely rare, and only occurs on the aforementioned condition of the singer's silence (i.e. the symbolical death of the woman performer).

The singer thus has to face not only the consequences of her own artistic and personal life choices, but more dramatically, society's reaction to her lifestyle outside the norms, and the implications of her ascribed 'nature'. Faced with contemporary feminine ideals, the singer's dilemma takes on an existentialist tone to the point that the singer's struggle often reveals itself as a question of life or death. Although the death of the artist, whether male or female, is to a certain extent a staple of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature in general, with the generally insoluble dilemma of the artist in society being a favourite literary theme, the denouement of the woman singer's struggle in her own death takes on a special quality and can be read on several levels. Going back to Rousseauesque song as the expression of a lost ideal, the singer's death appears as a sign of both aesthetic and textual irreconcilability: in her songs, and thus in her very nature, the singer communicates an ineffable ideal, a musical and female otherness that can hardly find an expression in the prosaic context. The singer herself is different to the point of incompatibility from her surroundings, as her song remains to a certain extent unattainable and unliveable. Here, the ideal of writing and speaking music merges with the fantasy of the singer as a sublime, non-prosaic creature who eventually cannot be sustained in a prosaic environment.

Additionally, this ineffable ideal of song blends into the taboo of the female performer. In the opposite sense, the ideal of the female singer as a performer often appears as unrealistic as the attempt to capture the essence of music on the written page. As I have explained above, the discourse on the singer reunites the various aspects of medicine, psychology, biology, philosophy and musical-literary aesthetics – as such, the singer's death is highly poetic as it plays with contemporary views on women's health and fragility. The stereotypical concerns about the singer's health are often highly stylized in literature, and in consequence the singer's untimely, mysterious 'consumption' appears as an undecipherable blend of medico-

philosophical views and poetic sublimity of the singer as an ‘unearthly’ creature. As we shall see in some of the case studies, the singer’s death occurs in moments of utmost physical and musical transcendence, as if her voice transcended the physical dimension of the performing body, and as if death were the only logical consequence of her conflictual inner nature, torn between the demands of artistic life and the higher source of her divine voice. Yet in other cases, death occurs almost prosaically and in few words, relating to the singer’s rapid decline and death as the logical result of a life lived alone and outside love and society. However, to regard the singer’s death as a stereotype of misogyny would be both wrong and simplistic, since her death needs to be analysed within the individual narrative context and as part of the singer’s overall agenda.

## Genius

In the light of this brief outline of musical-literary aesthetics and to conclude the discussion of the woman singer as compliant with or defiant of the contemporary ideals pertaining to woman and music and outlined in chapters 2 and 3, we finally need to address the crucial question of the singer as a musical genius, and literature’s take on this key paradigm of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought. In the light of what has been said so far, is the female singer really that different from male artists in literature and what, if at all, is her share in the debate on genius?<sup>148</sup>

If we want to understand the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century musical-literary discourse, we cannot ignore the importance of artistic genius, a concept quintessential and fundamental to European thought, as it marked the ‘extra something’ of the artist, that which made him different from others and surpass the ‘normal’ categories of human artistic production: ‘It was creativity, not reason or talent that made man resemble a god. [...] It was genius that made Poetry different from verse; Science different from industry and technology; Music more than mere tune, harmony and

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<sup>148</sup> For an excellent overview of the history of the concept of genius since Antiquity, and in particular for the topic of ‘female genius’ see Christine Battersby’s standard work *Gender and Genius*.



rhythm'.<sup>149</sup> Music in particular was considered one of the highest possible articulations of artistic genius, and interestingly, both music and genius were 'feminised' in that both were said to possess certain 'naturally' feminine qualities such as emotions, nature, and apparent simplicity and introspection.

Earlier concepts had defined as genius the civilised man, who was different from (and better than) savages or animals, through his 'reason'.<sup>150</sup> Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, genius came to be defined as someone possessing superior talent (for example a musician), yet it continued to be viewed merely as an exceptional capacity that was, theoretically, accessible to most men. In contrast to 18<sup>th</sup>-century thought then, the Romantic notion of genius implied that the artist was born with his sublime, God-given creativity, that it was a 'natural' part of himself, an 'extra something' that made him superior to other people, and which he was able to channel as original creativity and intellect, into original works of art. Genius came to reside within the human nature itself, taking the form of the sublime *other* of the male subject, the 'stranger within' in the words of Edward Young, whom man must know and revere.<sup>151</sup> The defining quality of 'genius' as human excellence, as the 'extra something' of human creativity became the artist's originality, rather than his skills or talent.<sup>152</sup>

It must be noted that late 18<sup>th</sup>-century and 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought conceptualised genius through the imagery of the irrational subconscious and of nature and her raw, savage processes, as well as through the imagery of man's 'natural' instinct and feeling, which emphasised the belief that genius was a 'naturally'-given characteristic of excellence.<sup>153</sup> What is important in this context is that late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>- century concepts of genius drew on characteristics normally ascribed to women (the image of the artist as a procreator, 'giving birth' to his works of art, was crucial) – yet though a theoretical link between woman and genius might have been implied, the possibility of a woman genius was vehemently excluded by most authors of the time, such as Kant, Schiller or William Duff.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Battersby, p.4.

<sup>150</sup> See Battersby, p.3.

<sup>151</sup> Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, pp.53-54.

<sup>152</sup> See Battersby, pp.71-72.

<sup>153</sup> Ibidem, pp.74-75.

<sup>154</sup> Ibidem, pp.76-79. For Mary Wollstonecraft's position on this matter, see p.31.

The feminine qualities implied by genius were qualities that could be *appropriated* by male reason and which furthered the cult of the male, supreme artist as a wild, untamed man of nature, a hero and a priest-like figure.<sup>155</sup> Women were excluded from such concepts of male original creativity and supremacy, as it was their natural and intellectual deficiencies which disqualified them from the creative originality as a prerequisite for genius, which furthermore required an intellectual and psychological strength that only men were said to possess. Despite the importance of feminine qualities such as emotivity and passion in the concept of Romantic genius, women, according to contemporary gender theory, were regarded as not having the required physical and mental capacities to aspire to the realm of genius, and to develop the 'extra something' implied by genius, especially artistic originality and the capacity to (pro-) create truly excellent, sublime and original works of art. Their 'natural', biological weakness, as we have seen earlier, was perceived as part of their gendered character and extended to the realms of education, work, and especially artistry. The 'naturally deficient' woman remains a constant of European thought well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; depending on the author and the context, women were seen as lacking whichever faculty required for art and for genius happened to be *in vogue*.<sup>156</sup>

A woman could not be an original creator and could not produce works of artistic sublimity, of which she herself was considered a symbol. Should she attempt to emulate man and aspire to artistic genius and creativity, she by no means qualified as the coveted androgynous sublime of Romanticism, but rather as a freak of nature who should neither exist nor have her share in the great artistic achievements of society. Thus while on the one hand, the perfect artist came to be a feminised male, appropriating for instance the feminine essence of music, the androgynous, 'masculine' female on the other hand, if at all possible, was considered a freak of nature.<sup>157</sup> As an interesting footnote, the gender ideology of the time, in analogy to the man as a wild 'child of nature' and born artist also promoted the image of woman as a wild, untamed creature, which however served

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<sup>155</sup> See Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, pp.105-107.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp.165f. The infamous example of Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Character* (1903) is a noteworthy example of how misogynist views on women and art persevered well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>157</sup> Battersby, pp.78 ff.



to further promote the ideal of the domesticated female who, as a controlled wife and mother, was essential to the core stability of middle-class culture and values.

Genius remained the preserve of a *feminine* male,<sup>158</sup> i.e. of a male who, drawing on both male and female characteristics, appeared superior through his creative originality and was able to channel his supremacy in the form of sublime, artistic procreation. Musical genius in particular, in analogy to the feminised imagery of music discussed so far, was considered an ‘extra something’ to be revered and not coincidentally did the image of the composer or virtuoso of genius as a man capable of channelling the ‘other’ language that was music, into works of art, rise to unprecedented importance during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

These ideological underpinnings add to the controversy of the singer as a female artist at odds with social and philosophical positions alike, and make her discussion as a woman, yet as an original creator of art, and as a supreme human being characterised by the ‘extra something’ of artistic genius quite interesting.

As we have seen so far, views on the woman singer were contradictory, with literature being relatively free to discuss controversial paradigms. Do we encounter singers of genius in literature? Interestingly, some literary texts (both male- and female-authored) offer surprisingly strong treatments of female musical genius by developing the woman singer and her song along the lines of naturally-given artistic creativity and originality, and in extension as a creature not only of ‘otherness’, but potentially of supremacy. As we shall see in the case studies, the genius, and thus the supremacy of the singer is not only linked to her artistic originality, but also to her vocal characteristics; to the ‘genius’ of her voice proper, that is, to the supremacy, originality and sublimity of the sound that she produces. The singer’s genius is thus equally articulated through her voice, which stands as an entirely unique, inhuman sound that can neither be compared to other voices nor be reproduced.

Literary treatments clearly state a case on the singer as ‘more’ than just the traditional female stereotype, with her song going beyond the range of normal language. The singer most certainly is a ‘freak’ of nature, due to her hybridity and the subversive elements implied in both her character and her performance, which

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.11.

make her go much further than the simplistic ideal of female musicality. The singer represents the 'other' implied by genius, yet to what extent she is able to transform her musical otherness into artistic agency remains to be seen in the case studies. In theory, the singer may make a claim for original creativity that goes beyond artistic expressions considered normal, and she may therefore challenge the paradigm of exclusively male artistic genius and undermine binary categories of female/male, nature/art. What she certainly shares with her male counterparts is the 'extra something' that defines artistic genius, but which also exposes her to the problem shared by male artists: the constant danger of having to reconcile her own genius with the demands of a 'prosaic' social context, and the latent danger of being unable to cope with 'the stranger within'. Just like her male counterpart, the singer has to be able to channel the overflow of artistic self appropriately to avoid the 'too much' of the artist predisposing her for failure and death, and reconcile her exceptional self and the constraints of society. But if that was the case, would she still be considered a genius? In this dilemma, the singer is not so different from the male artist in literature.

These broad strokes must suffice to introduce the motif of the singer in its aesthetic complexity and to prepare the individual, detailed case studies that we shall now turn to. As we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, between the poles of song ideals, *woman-music* and the question of the female performer, neither theoretical nor literary treatments seem to offer a homogeneous view on this topic. Rather, literature develops possibilities of female artistic agency as opposed to the stereotypical representation of the singer according to female song ideals. It is from this multifaceted imagery that the fascination of the literary motif stems, a motif whose trajectory we will now trace in more detail through the individual case studies taking us from Goethe's Mignon all the way to the divas of the July Monarchy.



## Chapter 4

### **Goethe's Mignon and Madame de Staël's Corinne: Creating a Literary Archetype (1795-1807)**

The two major works forming the first case study need no lengthy introduction: Both Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his 1795/96 novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, and Germaine de Staël in her 1807 novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* created a standard work of the European canon and, through the traits of the poetic child-singer Mignon and her Italian counterpart, the artistic genius Corinne, two female characters that redefined notions of female musicality, genius and song performance around 1800. Written at the height of the debate surrounding music and woman which I have discussed in the previous two chapters, Mignon and Corinne share striking traits highlighting the complexity of the woman singer in literature during this period of transition so rich in musical-literary imagery. In this chapter, I shall discuss these two figures against the background of the authors' aesthetics and each novel's implications with regard to the female singer and the contemporary musical-literary discourse.

#### **(1) The Poetics of Performance: Mignon**

Of all singers that populate the German literary canon, Goethe's Mignon is one of the most iconic and recognizable characters, whose impact extended beyond the realm of German literature into the general imagery of European culture, into music and the fine arts. Yet of all literary singers, she is also one of the most enigmatic and contradictory creatures. Goethe himself claimed that he had written *Wilhelm Meister*, which he counted among the 'inkalkulabelsten Productionen, wozu mir fast selbst der Schlüssel

fehlt,'<sup>1</sup> explicitly for her and because of her<sup>2</sup> - a striking remark if one takes into account that Mignon is not the novel's protagonist. Responses to her were strong from the beginning: Schiller, who, as a friend and critic, accompanied Goethe during the redrafting process of *Meister*, stated that 'Mignon wird wahrscheinlich bei jedem ersten und auch zweiten Lesen die tiefste Furche zurücklassen'.<sup>3</sup> Presented as a 'Rätsel' throughout the novel,<sup>4</sup> Mignon constitutes an ongoing ontological and also structural problem, due to her mysterious nature and her contradictory, subversive character, which Goethe described as a 'Wahnsinn des Mißverhältnisses'.<sup>5</sup> It seems that of all characters that occur in the novel, Mignon best embodies Goethe's central statement about the novel's symbolism;<sup>6</sup> in turn, this heightens the fundamental paradox of her seemingly simple, yet underneath very complex, symbolical nature: 'Den anscheinenden Geringfügigkeiten des "Wilhelm Meister" liegt immer etwas Höheres zum Grunde, und es kommt bloß darauf an, daß man Augen, Weltkenntnis und Übersicht genug besitze, um im Kleinen das Größere wahrzunehmen'.<sup>7</sup>

Against the background of what has been said on musical culture and song aesthetics in the previous chapters, Mignon appeals as a singer written during a time of intense musical-literary debate, yet her mysterious, gender-transgressing character marks her as a very unusual case of female song. Like few other singers, she seems to express the central dichotomy that I have made explicit as fundamental to the problem of female song, namely the discrepancy between contemporary ideals of woman and

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<sup>1</sup> Talk with Eckermann, Rehbein and Riemer, 18.01.1825 (FA IXV, p.141).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Goethe stated this in connection with his critique of *De l'Allemagne* and of what he perceived to be Madame de Staël's blatant misunderstanding of Mignon as an 'épisode charmant' (DA III, p.256): 'Seine Unzufriedenheit über der Frau von Staël Urteile über seine Werke. Sie habe Mignon als Episode beurteilt, da doch das ganze Werk dieses Charakters wegen geschrieben sei. [...] Die Staël habe alle seine, Goethes, Produktionen abgerissen und isoliert betrachtet, ohne Ahnung ihres innren Zusammenhangs, ihrer Genesis'. (Chancellor von Müller, 29.05.1814. FA XXXIV, p.346)

<sup>3</sup> Schiller's letter to Goethe, 23.10. 1796 (MA VIII.1, pp.260-61)

<sup>4</sup> The actress Philine thus introduces Mignon to Wilhelm: 'Hier ist das Rätsel, rief [Philine], als sie das Kind zur Tür hereinzog'. (FA IX, p.451).

<sup>5</sup> Goethe writes this in his redrafting notes for *Wilhelm Meister* (Notizbuch 1793, Blatt 27, 35/36, 39 der Handschrift im Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Weimar); see HA VII, p.616.

<sup>6</sup> Chancellor von Müller notes that 'es mache Goethe Freude und Beruhigung zu finden, daß der ganze Roman durchaus symbolisch sei, daß hinter den vorgeschobenen Personen durchaus etwas Allgemeines, Höheres verborgen liegt'. (22.01.1821, FA XXXVI, p.143)

<sup>7</sup> Talk with Eckermann, 25.12. 1825 (FA IXV, p.165).



song, and its expression in the form of a female character – additionally, in the case of Mignon, her femininity is continuously under discussion. In what follows, we will discuss how Goethe develops Mignon and her songs between the extremes of poetic ideal and artistic agency and how far she sets the tone as an early archetype of female song.

## Existing Scholarship

Secondary literature on Goethe's life and work is understandably vast; and this also applies to the author's most important novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. However, while the novel itself as well as its poetic character Mignon have aroused considerable interest since their publication (and continue to do so), the number of scholarly works dealing with the specific focus on Mignon, music and song remains manageable. Only in recent years have scholars turned towards seemingly less important themes, such as the status of music within Goethe's thought and œuvre and feminist issues, both of which have opened up possibilities for a renewed discussion of Mignon. Music, a long-time neglected area in Goethe scholarship, since the author was never considered a 'musical' writer (a view he furthered through his own modesty and conservatism on the subject), has received increased interest in the last decade, as scholars acknowledge the importance that music had for him and, in consequence, how music affected his life and œuvre. Goethe was certainly more an 'Augenmensch' than an 'Ohrenmensch', yet his interest in music, and participation in musical culture and the musical-literary discourse is undeniable. Alongside the standard *Goethe-Handbuch* a number of individual works deal with music in Goethe's life, thought and writing.<sup>8</sup> Research focuses on Goethe's

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<sup>8</sup> See *Goethe-Handbuch*, ed. Bernd Witte (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996-1999); Heinrich Jaskola, 'Vom Geheimnis des Liedes. Theoretische Erwägungen Goethes und der Seinen zur Wort- und Tonkunst des Liedes', *Aurora* 26 (1966), 66-81; Thomas Frantzke, *Goethes Schauspiele mit Gesang und Singspiele, 1773-1782* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1998); *Eine Art Symbolik fürs Ohr: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Lyrik und Musik*, ed. Hermann Jung (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 2002); *Musik in Goethes Werk. Goethes Werk in der Musik*, ed. Andreas Ballstaedt/Ulrike Kienzle/Adolf Nowak (Schliengen: Argus, 2005); John Neubauer, 'On Goethe's Tonlehre', in *Music and German Literature. Their Relationship since the Middle*

musical writings and collaborations, especially his *Singspiele* and his crucial influence on composers,<sup>9</sup> as well as his theoretical *Tonlehre*, but also his relationship with musicians, such as the Weimar court singer Corona Schröter.<sup>10</sup> Generally, music remains a relatively unexplored field in Goethe studies, which is especially interesting with regard to a musical novel like *Wilhelm Meister*.

The latter has been assessed as a literary archetype<sup>11</sup> and artistic statement,<sup>12</sup> a milestone in German literature that defined the genre and heralded modernity.<sup>13</sup> Several studies have discussed Mignon's songs, with a shift from shorter, text-centred studies<sup>14</sup>

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Ages, ed. James McGlathery (Columbia: Camden House, 1992); Udo Quak, *Trost der Töne: Musik und Musiker im Leben Goethes* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2001); Robert Spaethling, 'Music in Goethe's Thought and Writing', in *The Romantic Tradition: German Literature and Music in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Gerald Chapple/Frederick Hall/Hans Schulte (Lanham/London: University Press of America, 1992), pp.113-32; Günther Sasse, 'Der Gesang als Medium der Sozialdisziplinierung in Goethes Roman *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*', *GJB* 118 (2001), 274-88.

<sup>9</sup> Few German authors have been set to music so often and proved to be so inspirational for composers as Goethe, whose lieder are among the most lyrical and musical in the German realm and who actively encouraged musicalizations of his poems. See *Goethe-Handbuch*, pp.726-27; Willi Schuh, *Goethe-Vertonungen. Ein Verzeichnis* (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1955); Steven Paul Scher, 'Mignon in Music', *Goethe in Italy, 1786-1986*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp.159-69.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Braun, *Corona Schröter. Goethes heimliche Liebe* (Düsseldorf/Zürich: Artemis & Winkler Verlag, 2004). Corona Schröter (1751-1802): Singer, composer, actress and painter, Corona trained under Adam Hiller in Leipzig, where she met Goethe in 1766. Moving to Weimar in 1776 as a new *Kammersängerin* and benefiting from the city's vibrant cultural life centred on the *Musenhof*, she became actively involved in the *Liebhabertheater*, acting, singing and providing some of the earliest musical adaptations of Goethe's poems. She withdrew from the Weimar court in 1788 and died of tuberculosis in 1802.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Behler, 'The Origins of the Romantic Literary Theory', *Colloquia Germanica* 1-2 (1968), 109-126; Behler, 'Goethes *Wilhelm Meister* und die Romantheorie der Frühromantik', in *Studien zur Romantik und zur idealistischen Philosophie 2*, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993): pp.157-72.

<sup>12</sup> Hannelore Schlaffer, *Wilhelm Meister. Das Ende der Kunst und die Wiederkehr des Mythos* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Hellmut Ammerlahn, *Imagination und Wahrheit. Goethes Künstler-Bildungsroman Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. Struktur, Symbolik, Poetologie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003); *Ibid.*, 'The Marriage of Artist Novel and Bildungsroman: Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, a Paradigm in Disguise', *GLL*, 59/1 (January 2006), 25-46; Karl Schlechta, *Goethes Wilhelm Meister*. (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1953).

<sup>14</sup> Herman Meyer, 'Mignons Italienlied und das Wesen der Verseinlage im ,Wilhelm Meister'', *Euphorion* 46 (1952), 149-69; *Ibid.*, 'Kennst Du das Haus? Eine Studie zu Goethes Palladio-Erlebnis', *Euphorion* 47 (1953), 281-94; Werner Ross, 'Kennst Du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen? Zur Vorgeschichte einer Goethe-Strophe', *GRM* 33 (1951/52), 172-88; Oskar Seidlin, 'Zur Mignon-Ballade', *Euphorion* 45 (1950), 83-99. Paul Requadt, *Die Bildersprache der deutschen Italien-Dichtung von Goethe bis Benn* (Bern: Franke, 1962); Arnd Bohm: ',O Vater, lass uns ziehn!': A Mythological Background to Mignon's Italian Song', *MLN* 100 (1985), 651-60.



to more in-depth assessments of song within Goethe's aesthetics,<sup>15</sup> and articles treating musical aspects.<sup>16</sup> Recent scholarship, reflecting the general trend in literary criticism, has embraced feminist issues, such as the representation of women in Goethe's work,<sup>17</sup> and questions of female speech and silencing,<sup>18</sup> which partly touch upon the very interesting aspect of Mignon's (and other female characters') vocality and loss thereof.

Studies on Mignon span a century of scholarship and thus embrace a variety of critical traditions. While the earliest studies focus on the character herself, offering rather general, biographical and psychopathological readings,<sup>19</sup> later scholarship emphasizes Mignon's aesthetics, her nature and function within the novel and within Goethe's thought. A predominant line of thought has been the notion of 'genius' and the understanding of Mignon as a divine child of genius;<sup>20</sup> thus, some important standard works have offered assessments of Mignon as she relates to Goethe's aesthetics and his concept of genius,<sup>21</sup> an interesting line to pursue in the light of the aforementioned

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter 1, n.15. Although short and poorly researched, there is a PhD thesis on Mignon and her songs exclusively: Johanna Lienhard, *Mignon und ihre Lieder* (Zürich: Artemis, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Reinhold Brinkmann, 'Kennst Du das Buch? Oder: Die Vertreibung der Musiknoten aus ,Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren'', *GJB* 118 (2001), 289-303. Akio Mayeda, 'Kennst du das Land?' Zur Musik der Dichtung und zur Poesie der Musik', in *Musik in Goethes Werk. Goethes Werk in der Musik*, pp.234-63.

<sup>17</sup> Martha B. Helfer, 'Wilhelm Meister's Women', *GYB*, 11 (2002), 229-55; Brigitte Kohn, 'Denn wer die Weiber hasst wie kann der leben?': die Weiblichkeitskonzeption in Goethes 'Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren' im Kontext von Sprach- und Ausdruckstheorie des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001); Anja May, *Wilhelm Meisters Schwestern: Bildungsromane von Frauen im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert* (Königstein/Taunus: U. Helmer, 2006); Sabine Groß, 'Diskursregelung und Weiblichkeit: Mignon und ihre Schwestern', in *Mignon und ihrer Schwestern*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1993), pp.83-99.

<sup>18</sup> Per Øhrgard, 'Anmerkungen zum Reden und Schweigen in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren*', *GJB* 118 (2001), 176-86; Ulrike Rainer, 'A Question of Silence: Goethe's Speechless Women', *Mignon und ihre Schwestern*, pp.101-112.

<sup>19</sup> Gustav Cohen, 'Mignon', *JGG* VII (1920), 132-53; Walter Wagner, 'Goethes Mignon', *GRM* 21 (1933), 401-415; Eugen Wolf, *Mignon: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Wilhelm Meister* (München: Beck, 1909).

<sup>20</sup> See Alfred Dornheim, 'Goethes Mignon und Thomas Manns Echo. Zwei Formen des göttlichen Kindes im deutschen Roman', *Euphorion*, 46 (1952), 315-47; Wilhelm Emrich, Symbolinterpretation und Mythenforschung. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen eines neuen Goetheverständnisses', *Euphorion* 47 (1953), 38-67; *Ibid.*, *Die Symbolik von Faust II: Sinn und Vorformen* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1957).

<sup>21</sup> See Hellmut Ammerlahn, 'Puppe-Tänzer-Dämon-Genius-Engel: Naturkind, Poesiekind und Kunstwerdung bei Goethe', *GQU* 54 (1981), 19-32; *Ibid.*, 'Mignons nachgetragene Vorgeschichte und das Inzestmotiv: Zur Genese und Symbolik der Goetheschen Geniusgestalten', *Monatshefte* 64 (1974), 15-25; *Ibid.*, 'Wilhelm Meisters Mignon – ein offenes Rätsel', *DVS* 42 (1968), 89-116; Monika Fick, *Das Scheitern des Genius* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1987); *Ibid.*, 'Mignon – Psychologie und Morphologie der Geniusallegorese in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahren*', *Sprachkunst* 13 (1982), 3-49.

debate on the singer as a figure of female genius. While these studies suggest the important link between Mignon and poetic genius, some argue that Mignon possesses no agency but acts as a poetic symbol, complementing and mirroring the male protagonist's quest for and eventual dismissal of poetry.<sup>22</sup> A central issue in Mignon scholarship, the question of her status as a symbol or a character in her own right not only adds to her enigma, but also adds complexity to our discussion of her in terms of song ideal and performance. The problem of classifying Mignon decidedly impacts on the question of her gender and androgyny, a topic often commented upon.<sup>23</sup> However, the question of femininity and sexuality for Mignon have traditionally been elided from the critical discussion, or predominantly read through a psychoanalytical approach.<sup>24</sup> Be that as it may, recent studies have attributed more importance to Mignon as a character in her own right, opening up broader, comparative readings,<sup>25</sup> giving credit to Mignon's influence as a pan-European cultural archetype in literature, music and art.<sup>26</sup> On the whole, Goethe scholarship has traditionally sought to symbolize Mignon, blending out

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<sup>22</sup> William Gilby, 'The Structural Significance of Mignon in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*', *Seminar* 16.3 (1980), 136-50; Karin Keppel-Kriems, *Mignon und Harfner in Goethes ,Wilhelm Meister': eine geschichtsphilosophische und kunsttheoretische Untersuchung zu Begriff und Gestaltung des Naiven* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> See Marie Delcourt, 'Deux interprétations romanesques du mythe de l'androgynie. Mignon et Séraphîta', *RLV* 38 (1972), 228-40; 340-47; Silke Horstkotte, 'Wilhelm Meisters Mignon und die Ambivalenz der Autorschaft', *GLL* 57.2 (April 2004), 143-57.

<sup>24</sup> Ursula Mahlendorf, 'The Mystery of Mignon: Object Relations, Abandonment, Child Abuse and Narrative Structure', *GYB* 7 (1994), 23-40; Thomas W. Kniescher, 'Die psychoanalytische Rezeption von Mignon', *Mignon und ihre Schwestern*, pp.61-81; Robert Tobin, 'The Medicinalization of Mignon', in *Mignon und ihre Schwestern*, pp.43-60.

<sup>25</sup> See René Anglade, 'Mignons emanzipierte Schwester: Heines kleine Harfenistin und ihre Bedeutung', *GRM* 41 (1991/3), 301-21; Stefanie Bach, 'Musical Gypsies and Anti-Classical Aesthetics: The Romantic Reception of Goethe's Mignon Character in Brentano's *Die mehreren Wehmüller und Ungarische Nationalgesichter*', in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism*, pp.105-119; Roger Bauer, 'De Mignon à l'Invitation au voyage', *RLC* 237 (1986), 51-57; Ingrid Broszeit-Rieger, 'Practice and Theory of Dance in Goethe's Meister', *Neophilologus* 90.2 (April 2006), 303-20; Julia König, *Das Leben im Kunstwerk* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1991); Fujita Tomonao, 'Wilhelm Meister dans l'œuvre de Gérard de Nerval', *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies* 41 (1992), 37-47; Patricia Zecevic, *The speaking divine woman: López de Úbeda's 'La pícara Justina' and Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister'* (Oxford: Lang, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Jutta Assel /Georg Jäger, *Goethe-Motive auf Postkarten. Eine Dokumentation. Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Mignon und der Harfner*, Goethezeit-Portal, February 2004

<<http://www.goethezeitportal.de/index.php?id=256>> [accessed 29 May, 2008]; Cordula Grewe, 'Mignon als Allegorie des Poetischen: Goetherezeption und Kunsttheorie in der deutschen Malerei der Spätromantik', in *Goethe und das Zeitalter der Romantik*, ed. Walter Hinderer (Würzburg: Königshausen und Naumann, 2002): pp.307-43; Erika Tunner, 'L'esprit de Mignon: Mignon-Bilder von der Klassik bis zur Gegenwart', *GJB* 106 (1989), 11-21.



the important issues of gender and performance in the light of Mignon's defiance of traditional categories, and in consequence neutralizing her as a mere symbol within Goethe's aesthetics, devoid of any true identity and agency of her own. Looking back at chapters 2 and 3, I shall, after a brief outline of Goethe's song aesthetics, discuss to what extent Mignon embraces the ideal of song in the post-Rousseauesque sense as she comments on contemporary song aesthetics and musical culture, thus reuniting the potentially very symbolic quality of female song with its accessible, popular aspects. As we shall see in the following study, Mignon unleashes a surprisingly strong, subversive potential beyond binary categories of music and gender.

### **Born from Song: Mignon in the Context of Goethe's Lied Aesthetics**

Mignon's songs, and thus her personality as a singer and performer have puzzled readers due to their mixture of simplicity and complexity. While there is certainly room for debate whether or not Mignon could be considered a typical woman singer (or a woman, for that matter), there has never been any doubt about the quality and exceptional nature of her songs, which came to define the character and play a central part in the responses to her. As we shall see, Mignon's origin, though open to speculation, is clearly situated within Goethe's musical aesthetics, during a time in which he himself, a theatre director in Weimar and great admirer of song, developed specific views on music, poetry and genius. Key aspects of these musical aesthetics resonate in Mignon and her songs. Although Goethe claimed that Mignon was entirely conceived as his own creation, it becomes evident that she contains an important and fertile element of 'female song' that we have discussed earlier, and which defies traditional views of gender and musical genius. To a certain extent, Mignon is one of the most accomplished variations of female song in Goethe's universe and in the musical-literary discourse of the time, pushing the boundaries of Goethe's own song aesthetics and the general discussion of woman and song much further, and setting up important key elements for later singer stories.

Against the background of musical culture and the feminization of the musical-literary discourse, Goethe was no exception to the rule in that, as a knowledgeable dilettante and artistic director, he responded strongly to contemporary culture and its associated musical imagery, including song. His earliest ventures into popular song occurred together with his sister Cornelia,<sup>27</sup> who transcribed the folk songs he had collected in Strasbourg. His artistic collaboration with the Weimar court singer Corona Schröter is well-documented, as is his appraisal of women singers like Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient (whose rendition of 'Erlkönig' in 1830 finally warmed the old Goethe to Schubert's setting of the poem) or Henriette Sontag, whom he affectionately called his little nightingale. From his childhood music practice to his semi-professional works at Weimar and beyond, Goethe remained immersed in a strong song culture and very aware of the special link between poetry and music. In his appraisal of the woman singer and his treatment of the feminine imagery attached to art and music, Goethe produced some fascinating poems like the homage to Corona Schröter in which, consistent with the contemporary aesthetics discussed earlier, he aestheticizes the beloved singer into art:

Es gönnten ihr die Musen jede Gunst.  
*Und die Natur erschuf in ihr die Kunst.*  
 So häuft sie willig jeden Reiz auf sich,  
 Und selbst dein Name ziert, CORONA, dich.

Sie tritt herbei. Seht sie gefällig stehn!  
 Nur absichtslos, doch wie mit Absicht schön.  
 Und hocherstaunt seht ihr in ihr vereint  
 Ein Ideal, das Künstlern nur erscheint.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Some scholars have seen in both Cornelia and Corona possible inspirations for Mignon, especially since the genesis of the novel coincides with Cornelia's death in 1777, and Goethe's infatuation with Corona in Weimar. In his memoirs, Goethe described his sister as musically gifted, ill-married and at odds with the world, 'ein indefinibles Wesen' (*FA* XIV, p.368).

<sup>28</sup> 'Auf Miedings Tod'. Johann Martin Mieding was the theatre carpenter ('Hofebenist') and stage manager, close to Weimar artists, and Goethe in particular. By including Corona in this homage, Goethe also pays his respects to the Weimar artistic community. Written at the height of their relationship and Corona's heyday in Weimar, the poem was first published in the *Tiefurter Journal* 23 (March 1782). *FA* I, p.367. My emphasis.



In this sublimation of the beloved woman into art, Goethe certainly plays with contemporary stereotypes like the muse imagery and the ideal of art springing directly from an unspoiled, natural context; but he also gives us clues about his own aesthetics of female artistry, and his vision of female song itself, which he describes as a direct communication between the voice, sound and the heart: ‘Sie öffnet ihren Mund, und lieblich fließt / Der weiche Ton, der sich um’s Herz ergießt’.<sup>29</sup> Though she had by no means a grand, operatic voice, Corona excelled as a lied interpreter, capable of composing and transcribing songs – a trait she shares to some extent with Mignon, of whom Goethe says that ‘[sie] kann wohl ihrem Wesen nach ein Lied, aber keine Arie singen’.<sup>30</sup> Both appear less as operatic divas than as genuine, ‘natural’ (i.e. untrained and unspoiled) singer-composers whose musicality is less a craft in which they trained than an intrinsic gift they were born with and which they execute ‘naturally’, in the spirit of 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideals pertaining to women and music. Goethe was not opposed to grand opera, on the contrary, as his rapport with Mozart’s œuvre and his open admiration for the genre and its interpreters shows. Yet when it comes to vocal music, he showed a clear preference for a specific type of ‘natural’ song that directly stems from the innermost part of the singer, creating the connection between the human soul and heart and the universe. As such, song becomes a sign of genius, which, despite being couched in sometimes stereotypical descriptions of femininity, shows Goethe’s admiration of Corona the artist who combines original, artistic creativity with a noble, refined, purist female allure. Although Goethe draws on stereotypical images linked to female song, song itself constitutes a noble principle for him, a carrier of poetic genius and completeness. Throughout his life, Goethe considered song as the privileged union of words and music, as a sign of original poetic utterance which, in the tradition of Rousseau’s thought and other earlier writers such as Goethe’s mentor Herder, goes back to the origin of human expression and the concept of song as part of his poetic self and a way of poeticizing the personal experience. From a very early point on, song occupied a

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.368.

<sup>30</sup> See *FA* XXXVI, p.284. Goethe is reported to have said this to the Bohemian composer Wenzel Tomaschek in response to his adaptation of Mignon’s songs.

place of emotional relief and reconciliation of extreme states of mind for Goethe, a personal and poetic catharsis referring to the grander, nobler principles of human existence: ‘Spät erklingt was früh erklang, Glück und Unglück wird Gesang’.<sup>31</sup>

Music transforms human speech into something much stronger and more emotional, as well as something nobler. In this, Goethe is consistent with late 18<sup>th</sup>-century concepts of song as ‘heightened speech’ and as the language of the human soul and heart:<sup>32</sup> ‘Wie die Musik nichts ist ohne menschliche Stimme, so wäre mein Leben nichts ohne deine Liebe’.<sup>33</sup> Like the theorists discussed in chapter 3, Goethe prefers the human voice to the instrument and affirms the intimate link between music and the spoken word, between poet and musician. Like many other authors, Goethe found access to music through poetry, and in consequence, his musical aesthetics are firmly tied to his understanding of poetry and the natural interdependence between music and words – a union he found perfectly embodied in the *Volkslied*, for example.

In terms of song aesthetics, however, Goethe goes further than Rousseau and other writers discussed earlier: In his *Tonlehre*, developed throughout his friendship with Zelter, Goethe grounds his musical understanding on voice and song, and he furthermore ascribes both genius and artistic agency to singer and song, as part of the poetic sublimity and originality that both imply – an early signpost for later Romantic paradigms of music and poetic genius. In this, Goethe takes the 18<sup>th</sup>-century ‘ideal song’ further and conceptualizes it as the expression of poetic genius and a legitimate

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<sup>31</sup> This is how Goethe introduces the last authoritative edition of his poems, in which he included the Wilhelm Meister lieder: *Goethe's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*. Stuttgart; Cotta, 1827-30 [1815 for the cited preamble]. *FA* II, p.11.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 3. When Goethe has Wilhelm comment specifically on Mignon's ‘Melodie und Ausdruck’, he rewrites a central paradigm of musical aesthetics (see also *Tonlehre*, *MA* IX, pp.923-26). Goethe clearly follows contemporary ideals of music as a language beyond (or before) actual language, an origin to which all human expression goes back, and from which poetry was born. The basic musicality is apparent in Goethe's poetry, but also in his understanding of the moving body and the musicality that surrounds the human body and soul, which is again reminiscent of Rousseau's aesthetics: ‘les sons annoncent le mouvement; la voix annonce un être sensible; il n'y a que des corps animés qui chantent’ (*Œuvres* V, p.420). Goethe has Wilhelm Meister comment on the analogy between music, words and the body's movement thus: ‘Innerlich scheint mir oft ein geheimer Genius etwas Rhythmisches vorzuflüstern, so dass ich mich beim Wandern jedes Mal im Takt bewege und zugleich leise Töne zu vernehmen glaube, wodurch denn irgendein Lied begleitet wird, das sich mir auf eine oder die andere Weise gefällig vergegenwärtigt’. (*FA* X, p.589).

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Charlotte von Stein, dated early august 1782, *GA* XVIII, p.684.



artistic expression. ‘Der Gesang ist völlig produktiv an sich. – Naturell des äußern und Genie des innern Sinnes werden durchaus gefordert’.<sup>34</sup> One of his central statements on song, Goethe’s commentary on the unique blend of seemingly ‘natural’ exterior and inherent genius may well apply to a singer like Corona, whom he characterized by similar traits in *Auf Miedings Tod* and whom he appreciated for these exact qualities – or a singer like Mignon who performs seemingly simplistic songs, lieder not arias, yet who hides a deeply disturbing and complex poetic genius underneath these songs, all the while proving to be remarkably autonomous and integral as an artist. Goethe remains profoundly fascinated with the poetic core of song, with a genius that is sublime in nature, yet channelled through human performance, and, superior to mere speech, capable of expressing the inexpressible. It is this quality of the ‘natural sublime’, so difficult to grasp and rationalize, that Goethe appreciates in song, on a theoretical level but also in very concrete cases like his attempt to poeticize Corona’s performance as an embodiment of art, or Wilhelm’s struggle to translate Mignon’s song in the novel. Song transcription and rationalization constitute impossible endeavours since for Goethe the genius of song represents an insoluble enigma, of which one catches a glimpse through the singer’s immediate performance and, retrospectively, through the poet’s attempt to poeticize it. Like other contemporaries, Goethe draws on stereotypical paradigms when aestheticizing the woman singer, yet in contrast to the Rousseauesque condemnation of female performers, Goethe is able to see the poetic quality and the genius of song even in professional singers. Nevertheless, he navigates a fine line between the listener’s and onlooker’s fascination with the idealization and interpretation of song and the singer, and its counterpart of artistic agency which the singer affirms through her performance and through which she reveals a sublime, unspeakable genius. Likewise, Goethe’s view on the ambivalence of music that I have discussed earlier is less tied to the female musician than expressed more generally, as the ambivalence of human nature itself, in all its genius. His understanding of song as

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<sup>34</sup> *MA IX*, p.924. Goethe describes his vision of music as ‘eine Art Symbolik fürs Ohr, wodurch der Gegenstand [...] weder nachgeahmt noch gemalt, sondern in der Imagination auf eine ganz eigene und unbegreifliche Weise hervorgebracht wird, indem das Bezeichnete mit dem Bezeichnenden in fast gar keinem Verhältnis zu stehen scheint’ (*MA XX.1*, p.226).

musical-poetic genius to a certain extent implies an unmediated, spontaneous, potentially limitless and chaotic poetic utterance. Music for Goethe is never mere pleasure but always linked to the higher purpose, to the sublime effect it has on the listener as well as to its inspirational power for the poet. To Goethe, music most often appeared as a soothing, cathartic principle, able to free his poetic spirit: 'Meine Seele löst sich nach und nach durch die lieblichen Töne aus den Banden der Protokolle und Acten'.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to his theoretical writings on music and its rapport with poetic genius, we notice a much darker tone in his prose work. This may be another illustration of Goethe's need for poetic catharsis and his transformation of a personal state of mind through his writing, his musical need which he claimed helped him overcome his darker moods.<sup>36</sup> In his early novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Goethe creates a very typical treatment of female song that wields its profoundly ambivalent potential, when Werther describes Lotte thus:

Sie ist mir heilig [...] sie hat eine Melodie, die sie auf dem Klaviere spielt mit der Kraft eines Engels, so simpel und so geistvoll! Es ist ihr Liebling [...] Kein Wort von der Zauberkraft der alten Musik ist mir unwahrscheinlich, wie mich der einfache Gesang angreift! Und wie sie ihn anzubringen weiß, oft zur Zeit, wo ich mir eine Kugel vor den Kopf schießen möchte! Die Irrung und Finsternis meiner Seele zerstreut sich, und ich atme wieder freier.<sup>37</sup>

A crucial example for the problematic link between woman and music, *Werther* establishes the paradox of song as a potentially soothing, cathartic experience, which nevertheless unleashes a destructive potential if acting on a susceptible person. The singer Lotte is both sublimated and sensualised through her *Leiblied* – a song which links the female body with the male protagonist's desire for and idealization of her, the paradigm which I discussed earlier as central to the motif of female song and musical ambiguity. The experience of the beloved woman's song is just as much an emotional and psychological ideal as it is a visceral, physical experience, reflecting Werther's

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<sup>35</sup> Letter to Charlotte von Stein, 22.02.1779 (*FA* IXXX, p.157).

<sup>36</sup> Goethe frequently remarked on the soothing effect that music had on him and his affection for musicians (see *MA* XX.1, pp.745-48).

<sup>37</sup> *FA* VIII, p.79 (B).



contradictory state of mind between euphoria and suicidal depression. It becomes clear that the soothing, cathartic effect of music implies a rather dark counterpart, further fuelled by the glorification of Lotte's song and the intensity of the musical-poetic experience. In the light of Goethe's song aesthetics, Mignon occupies a crucial threshold position between the younger Goethe's impetuosity and the mature author's need for measure and reason, between the untamed genius of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century lied and a rather complex preoccupation with disparate gender and performance models. Finally, incarnating Goethe's personal views on the musical experience, Mignon bridges the gap between a naturally-given genius and its potentially dark, subversive side.

Goethe's later views on song eventually move away from extreme positions like Werther or Mignon, in that he moderates his views on song by emphasizing its social side, advocating communal vocal practice as a tool for socialization and social integration in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*: 'Innig verschmolzen mit Musik heilt [die Dichtkunst] alle Seelenleiden aus dem Grunde, indem sie solche gewaltig anregt, hervorruft und in auflösenden Schmerzen verflüchtigt'.<sup>38</sup> Whether this rings true for Mignon remains to be seen in the following discussion.

## A Poetic Cipher? Mignon's Existence through Song

### Synopsis

*Following an unhappy love affair with the actress Mariane, Wilhelm, a young man from a wealthy bourgeois background undertakes an 'apprenticeship' journey into the world, pursuing his long-time wish to become a professional theatre practitioner. En route, he joins a wandering theatre troupe and comes across the mysterious harpist Augustin and the orphaned child-singer Mignon, who appears androgynous to Wilhelm and the theatre troupe and dresses in boys clothes. He becomes deeply attached to her and symbolically adopts Mignon who develops an increasingly obsessive, pathological love for her new father, accompanying him with her enigmatic songs. Eventually, Wilhelm*

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<sup>38</sup> FA X, p.475. Not unlike later writers like Hoffmann and Berlioz, Goethe develops ideas of social utopia based on music (FA X, pp.518ff.)

*distances himself from the world of theatre, from Augustin and Mignon in order to find his place as a fully-fledged member of society. He marries the aristocrat Natalie and recognizes Felix, his son with Mariane. Consumed by her painful, melancholic inner state of mind, Mignon finally dies from a (symbolically) broken heart, just as Wilhelm confirms his new status within a rational, economical society.*

Mignon is an unusual singer in that she leads an existence exclusively through her songs – as a narrative structure, she is literally born through her *lieder*. She would barely exist in the novel without them, and those *lieder* survive her long after the novel. Strangely absent from the main text, surfacing occasionally and always in a highly unusual fashion, the singer communicates most intensively through her four vocal performances, which structure the novel and Mignon's relationship with Wilhelm who has adopted her as his 'child of the heart'.<sup>39</sup> Yet Mignon is far from being one of those innocent dancers and singers conjured up by 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideals of 'natural' song, who sing as they speak and vice versa. In contrast to contemporary song ideals, Mignon appears as the antithesis of the singer as a popular and social creature: neither a diva nor a dilettante, nor a cipher for sublime song, she sings seemingly simplistic songs which however are just as much a 'riddle' as the singer herself and underline the reader's difficulty in establishing who Mignon truly is: a muse-like figure or a poetic symbol, whose songs constitute enigmatic depictions of poetic genius just as much as they imply a certain degree of artistic agency.<sup>40</sup> Goethe's lengthy redrafting process adds to the complexity of the character and her position within the novel.<sup>41</sup>

Liberated by Wilhelm from an abusive existence as the member of a wandering artist troupe, where she is forced to dance and perform tricks, Mignon becomes attached

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<sup>39</sup> 'dieses verlassene Wesen an Kindesstatt seinem Herzen einzuverleiben' (*FA IX*, p.469); see Fick, 'Mignon', pp.11ff; Ammerlahn, 'Wilhelm Meisters Mignon', pp.100ff.

<sup>40</sup> Goethe scholarship appears divided on the issue. Although the majority of studies categorize Mignon as a symbolic character directly linked to Wilhelm, some studies (especially Winter, Kieß and Lienhard) have emphasized the individual quality of the character and her songs. Interestingly, Mignon is the novel's only character who was so strongly read as a fascinating figure in her own right.

<sup>41</sup> Like *Faust*, *Wilhelm Meister* was a project that occupied Goethe throughout his lifetime. The core of the *Lehrjahre*, the theatrical novel *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (discovered in 1911) that the author drafted during his first decade in Weimar, is still apparent in the first five books of the *Lehrjahre* which describe Wilhelm's life in the theatrical world. The 6<sup>th</sup> book, an interspersed confession of the 'beautiful soul' as well as the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> books, which constitute the 'Sozialroman' were added during the mature Goethe's redrafting process, after his personal and artistic rebirth in Italy. For a detailed analysis of the genesis of the *Meister* project, see *FA IX*, pp.1133ff.



to the protagonist. It is with him and for him that she henceforth presents her most beautiful, sublime songs, in which she lays bare her emotional state. The intense, symbiotic relationship between Mignon and Wilhelm has been at the centre of most scholarly studies, with the result that Mignon is traditionally perceived as an extension and incarnation of Wilhelm's own psyche, his heart and soul. As a 'child of poetry', Mignon is equally the 'Herzenskind' for Wilhelm, whom he adopts during a time of extreme emotional distress, and whom he abandons to her death once he has found his own, biological child Felix and regained inner peace of mind. Mignon is symbiotically close to Wilhelm, and her development, her thriving as well as her untimely decline and death are closely connected to Wilhelm's own path towards maturity and social integration – it is within this tense, disparate frame of artistic autonomy, symbolism and poetic symbiosis that Mignon must be understood throughout the novel. However, Mignon's death is a prerequisite for Wilhelm's full integration into society. While this is an important observation regarding Mignon who often appears as a riddle and poetic cipher lacking a social dimension, considering her merely a 'symbol' fails to grasp her complexity and the author's ongoing preoccupation with poetic genius, theatre, song, education and the conflict between the individual and society.<sup>42</sup> As I will argue, Mignon is a strikingly complex character that bears strong symbolic and performative qualities, and whose complexity is reinforced through Goethe's use of female song paradigms and his development of the character along the contrasting lines of song ideals and performance.

The most striking example of Mignon's paradoxical nature occurs between the second and third book, which describes her road to adoption as the child of Wilhelm's ailing heart. In a scene both suggestively erotic and symbolically abstract, Mignon experiences a physical and emotional seizure that seems to spring directly from her painful heart:

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<sup>42</sup> Some critics like Hellmut Ammerlahn even go as far as to claim a direct interdependence: 'ohne Wilhelm gäbe es keine Mignon [...] Mignon ist weniger und mehr als Person: sie ist vor allem Symbol'. (Ammerlahn, 'Wilhelm Meisters Mignon', p.90). Since these earlier studies, some scholars have come to more complex readings of Mignon, giving her credit as a character beyond the mere function of poetic symbol.

Die Zuckung dauerte fort, die vom Herzen sich den schlotternden Gliedern mitteilte; sie hing nur in seinen Armen. Er schloss sie an sein Herz, und benetzte sie mit seinen Tränen. Auf einmal schien sie wieder angespannt, wie eins, das den höchsten körperlichen Schmerz erträgt; und bald mit einer neuen Heftigkeit wurden alle ihre Glieder wieder lebendig, und sie warf sich ihm, wie ein Ressor, das zuschlägt, um den Hals, indem in ihrem Innersten wie ein gewaltiger Riß geschah, und in dem Augenblicke floß ein Strom von Tränen in seinen Busen.<sup>43</sup>

Mignon collapses against Wilhelm's heart, the intense connection between the two and their respective psychological situations culminating in Wilhelm's adoption of the girl. In the following chapters, they bond intensely to the point that Mignon wastes away as soon as Wilhelm turns away from the realm of poetry which she and the harpist embody – a realm deemed sick and asocial – in order to gain his full place in society. However, in this two-fold adoption process, Mignon also displays a stunning degree of poetic autonomy. In the scene following her seizure, she performs the famous 'Italienlied' for her new-found father, a song which may be regarded as a poetic epiphany and, in combination with her preceding 'heart crisis' as a poetic catharsis, during which the transformed Mignon reveals her inner self to Wilhelm and in which, for the first time, she seems to offer an answer to her paradoxical nature displayed so far in the text. For the first time in the novel, Mignon genuinely 'speaks'. However, as much as the song appeals to Wilhelm, it confronts him with yet another insoluble riddle:

Melodie und Ausdruck gefielen unserm Freund besonders, ob er gleich die Worte nicht alle verstehen konnte. Er ließ sich die Strophen wiederholen und erklären, schrieb sie auf und übersetzte sie ins Deutsche. Aber die Originalität der Wendungen konnte er nur von ferne nachahmen. Die kindliche Unschuld des Ausdrucks verschwand, indem die gebrochene Sprache übereinstimmend, und das Unzusammenhängende verbunden ward. Auch konnte der Reiz der Melodie mit nichts verglichen werden.<sup>44</sup>

Although clearly making an effort to understand, translate and transcribe Mignon's Italy song, Wilhelm ultimately fails to grasp the girl's words and notes rationally – his sole access to the song lies in Mignon's immediate performance, present in the moment

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<sup>43</sup> *FA IX*, p.498.

<sup>44</sup> *FA IX*, p.504.



itself and only there – however, at the core of this utterly enigmatic performance lies the true poetic essence of Mignon, who sings of nothing but herself and her emotions, longing for a lost fatherland, home and for unspoiled nature, a home which she can only describe in undecipherable, musical poetry.<sup>45</sup> Goethe contrasts Mignon's essence, her innermost self expressed through song, with Wilhelm's and the reader's inability to grasp, conserve and replicate the original nature of the song. This is a problem the author himself encountered numerous times as he attempted to transcribe the genius, the 'natural sublime' of song into a written account. What is more important in this context is that the mysterious, inaccessible nature of Mignon's song profoundly marks her as a foreign, non-prosaic element within the novel. Singer and song remain inaccessible to rational language and thus Mignon not only preserves the symbolical nature of the poetic genius, but safeguards for herself a degree of poetic autonomy and purity through her songs. The social and linguistic dimension of song is presented as a conscious act of rejection, as hers is a song that is visibly there, written as part of the novel yet ultimately, in its undisclosed meaning, outside the narrative context (in the sense that the literary transcription of her song remains approximate and unable to render Mignon's 'true' language and meaning beyond the prose context of the novel).<sup>46</sup>

Unlike most authors of his generation, Goethe thus portrays very accurately the fascination of song as a form of *Ursprache* and original way of expression that precedes rational language and remains strangely 'bodiless' when incorporated into the narrative.<sup>47</sup> Confronted with the insoluble problem of transcribing the singer's song into prose, Goethe brilliantly avoids the problem by approximating Mignon's song *ex negativo*, through Wilhelm's failed attempts at understanding and transcribing it. At the same time, Mignon makes a strong statement for herself and her gift, refusing any kind of appropriation by the listener. Rejecting attempts at objectification, she essentially maintains the position of indecipherable lyrical subject, and thus the 'unspeakable' core of her songs, until the very end. Although her transcribed songs accompany Wilhelm

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<sup>45</sup> See Seidlin, pp.83ff; Meyer, 'Mignons Italienlied', pp.149ff; Bohm, pp.651 ff.

<sup>46</sup> See Winter, pp.143ff; Fick, *Das Scheitern*, pp.182f.

<sup>47</sup> See the Seidlin/Meyer debate (*Euphorion* 45-47), especially Seidlin, pp.88ff; Roß, pp.186-87; Requadt, pp.10ff.

throughout his various stages and are subject to narrative analysis and scrutiny, they lead any kind of definitive interpretation ad absurdum.<sup>48</sup>

Mignon's second song, 'Sehnsucht', which is a duet with the harpist, seems to mirror Wilhelm's own state of reverie and nostalgia.<sup>49</sup> However, after Wilhelm's failed attempts at deciphering the Italy song, one remains suspicious as to the truthful, authentic transcription of the later songs. In what follows, Mignon's last two songs mark a clear break with her first two performances insofar as the narration more successfully alienates the singer from her performance. Mignon's third lied is in fact described as a 'poem' by the narrator, who consciously inserts it at the end of the fifth book, just when Wilhelm is about to leave Mignon behind, although the narration states that Mignon has recited the poem repeatedly, and much earlier. Bidding farewell to her adoptive father, Mignon again confirms her enigmatic nature and her central conflict of wanting to communicate her innermost self to Wilhelm – 'ich möchte dir mein ganzes Innre zeigen'<sup>50</sup> – yet being unable to do so, feeling the need to guard this essence of herself. Mignon's 'credo' occurs at a central point in the novel as it becomes obvious that Wilhelm is slowly turning away from the realm of poetry, from Mignon and the harpist, and turning towards a different, bourgeois lifestyle that will see him eventually marry into the aristocracy and lead an economical, rational life. The fact that this lied is not sung and transcribed retrospectively, but literally edited by the narrator indicates a definite weakening of the singer's status within the novel – or at least the conscious effort on the part of the narration to present Mignon as a poetic mirror and accompaniment for Wilhelm's evolution. The original charm of the Italy song, which was the closest Wilhelm (and the reader) ever got to Mignon's essence as she only expressed it in song, is from now on lost.<sup>51</sup> Yet in contrast to these attempts at narrative framing, Mignon generally appears as a strong poet, whom the narrator describes as

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<sup>48</sup> See Kieß, pp.129ff.

<sup>49</sup> 'und wie einstimmend mit seinen Empfindungen war das Lied [...]' *FA IX*, p.603.

<sup>50</sup> *FA IX*, p.726.

<sup>51</sup> Be that as it may, Goethe significantly changed the status of this lied from the *Sendung* to the *Lehrjahre*. In the *Sendung*, Mignon recites this as her first lied, and it is not her own, since Wilhelm wrote it for her to recite. See *FA IX*, p.167. In the *Lehrjahre*, Goethe places Mignon's crucial self-reflection in the moment of separation from Wilhelm, and he attributes the lines to Mignon only.



particularly suited to the ode, thus linking her to one of the strongest genres of the *Sturm und Drang* concept of poetic genius.<sup>52</sup>

Mignon's last song, as well-known as her *Italienlied*, constitutes a final performance of lyrical transcendence: 'So lasst mich scheinen bis ich werde'.<sup>53</sup> It confirms once more Mignon's exclusive state as a genius outside narrative and social frames and expectations, which enables her to undermine the attempts by those around her to decipher her. The song is a highly lyrical description of Mignon's hope for transcendence and reconciliation with her poetic self, whose natural conclusion can only lie in her physical death and the abandonment of all prosaic, earthly constraints. Disguised as an angel, from a position high above the listeners, Mignon sings for a birthday gathering of children at the residence of Countess Natalie (who eventually becomes Wilhelm's wife). The central message of her song yet again relates to the essential paradox of her nature, that of her 'being' as opposed to her 'appearance' and what she seems to be (or what the narration presents her as). Through song, Mignon poetically prefigures her physical death – in this sense, it appears logical that this swansong is also the performance most alienated from the singer, since it is in fact Natalie who retrospectively relates the girl's performance to Wilhelm, further adding bias and interpretation to the song and appropriating the singer's discourse, while the latter is silenced.<sup>54</sup> What is more, by choosing Natalie as Mignon's 'interpreter' in this situation, Goethe juxtaposes two very different, antagonistic female characters, a constellation we find repeatedly in later narratives. Focussing once more on the central problem of Mignon in the novel, Natalie, a true representative of the prosaic order, blatantly misunderstands the girl's song performance and consequently her true nature. While her environment considers Mignon's angel-dress to be a mere disguise, the girl regards her new clothes as an affirmation of her transcendent state, a promise of what is to come. To Natalie, who is stylized as the 'true Amazon' and Wilhelm's ideal of

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<sup>52</sup> *FA IX*, p.650. See Herder's theory of the ode as the divine in nature. 'Von der Ode'. *Werke in 10 Bänden*, I (Frühe Schriften 1764-1772), pp.57-91.

<sup>53</sup> *FA IX*, pp.894/895.

<sup>54</sup> A similar silencing occurs at the end of Fischer's *Justine*, where the singer loses out against the more traditional type of femininity embodied by Sophie (see chapter 5).

femininity, the cross-dressing, androgynous girl seems to have finally accepted a more feminine allure, whereas for Mignon herself, her angelic dress is but the last stage before passing on to a state of divine genderlessness that abandons earthly categories of gender, body and age. Thus, one of Mignon's most powerful songs is uncomfortably filtered through the most prosaic perspective of Natalie who is confident that she can cure the young girl of her sorrow and androgyny. Mignon's claims to artistic and personal autonomy clashes with the increasing rationalization that is forced upon her by society in the novel's last two books, marked by the gradually pronounced rift between Mignon's poetic essence and the way in which her surroundings portray her. The doctor, though trying to assess her ailment, can only relate what has already become evident throughout the novel:

Die sonderbare Natur des guten Kindes [...] besteht beinahe nur aus einer tiefen Sehnsucht; das Verlangen, ihr Vaterland wieder zu sehen, und das Verlangen nach Ihnen, mein Freund, ist, möchte ich fast sagen, das einzige Irdische an ihr, beides greift nur in eine unendliche Ferne, beide Gegenstände liegen unerreichbar vor diesem einzigen Gemüt.<sup>55</sup>

Her eventual physical death occurs almost as an afterthought to her 'true', poetic death in the scene of 'So lasst mich scheinen'. After losing to Felix during a playful race for Wilhelm's attention, Mignon's incommunicable heart, so far linked to Wilhelm, simply breaks, as the girl literally wills it to stop, exerting control even in this last moment: 'Laß es brechen! sagte Mignon, mit einem tiefen Seufzer, es schlägt schon zu lange'.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, all Mignon's four lieder constitute a profound conflict between their enigmatic, poetic core and a distinct linguistic and performative compromise forced upon them through narrative constraints – a conflict met by the singer's quiet defiance. Throughout the novel she barely evolves at all, unless towards a less and less prosaic nature that undermines the narrative context and eschews all attempts of her surroundings to rationalize and master her. To Wilhelm's wish to see her educated and

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<sup>55</sup> *FA IX*, pp.901/902.

<sup>56</sup> *FA IX*, p.924.



integrated into society, she merely replies 'ich bin gebildet genug um zu lieben und zu trauern'.<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, as pure emotion and pure poetry, Mignon draws her entire existence from and through song, which constitutes one of her few means to engage and communicate with her surroundings and Wilhelm. As such, she remains true to herself and safeguards her artistic integrity. On the other hand, this quality proves fatal for her, as the riddle that she constitutes can find no adequate translation in the novel's prose and its dogma of bourgeois life.

However, the narrative constraints forced upon the singer and her songs never manage to destroy their original mystery and fascination – an aspect Goethe very consciously and strongly develops through the continuous confrontation between Mignon's poetic space and a prosaic world which does everything to translate and explain her, and literally put Mignon, and thus song, into words.<sup>58</sup> The lemon and orange trees from Mignon's Italy song reoccur as symbols of pathology and sickly poetry,<sup>59</sup> when the harpist defends his incestuous relationship with his sister Sperata (whose daughter Mignon is finally revealed to be) with a similar choice of words:

Begegnet uns unter jenen Zypressen, die ihre ernsthaften Gipfel gen Himmel wenden, besucht uns an jenen Spalieren, wo die Zitronen und Pomeranzen neben uns blühn, wo die zierliche Myrte uns ihre zarten Blumen darreicht, und dann wagt es, uns mit euren trüben, grauen, von Menschen gesponnenen Netzen zu ängstigen!<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, these belated rational explanations of Mignon's strangeness appear as somewhat arbitrary attempts at mastering Mignon through a retrospective 'explanation' as a child of incest, and her simultaneous transposition into a preserved art object during her funeral, which is carried out in a rational, scientific manner: 'Aber wenn die Kunst den scheidenden Geist nicht zu fesseln vermochte; so hat sie alle ihre Mittel angewandt, den Körper zu erhalten [...] Treten Sie näher, meine Freunde, und sehen Sie das

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<sup>57</sup> *FA IX*, p.866.

<sup>58</sup> Likewise, this ongoing fascination with finding a 'rational' explanation for Mignon and her songs has prompted critics to interpret the character in psychoanalytical or medical terms. See n. 26.

<sup>59</sup> See Ammerlahn, *Imagination und Wahrheit*, pp.329-41.

<sup>60</sup> *FA IX*, p.965.

Wunder der Kunst und Sorgfalt!’<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, the enigma of singer and song remain unsolved and within the higher, symbolic realm of poetic genius.

From what has been said so far, we can see how Mignon sets up important key elements for future treatments of female song. Though Mignon is far from being an operatic singer (she in fact abhors the stage and, unlike in the *Theatralische Sendung*, cannot be convinced to perform in a theatrical production),<sup>62</sup> she portrays a very visible, poetic vision of song. As an untrained and unspoiled ‘natural’ singer who captures the sublime essence of music, Mignon comes close to Goethe’s ideal of the human singing voice as an original, undecipherable language, both unspoilt and divine. Although she cannot communicate her songs within the prosaic context, Mignon is, in the narrative context, the authoritative author of her songs, a status she maintains until her death and which is further affirmed by her refusal to adapt, withdrawing from any social constraints through physical death. Although Goethe draws on contemporary song ideals, as well as the symbolic dimension of music and poetry as higher, all-encompassing principles, he takes the discussion significantly further by dramatizing singer and song in rather dark tones, and by tying the aesthetic question of song’s emotivity and elusiveness to the existence of the song’s performer. Mignon’s ambiguity derives from her conceptualization as both a poetic symbol and a highly individualistic, melancholic singer who embodies the emotional depth and poetic genius of song, yet who at no point gains significant comfort from her singing – contrary to Goethe to whom, at all times, music was a positive, soothing principle. As such, Mignon the singer not only appears as ‘anti-prosaic’ within the novel’s narrative order, but also as ‘anti-song’ in the sense that she displays a more complex, paradoxical vision of musical aesthetics than traditional notions of singer and performance around 1800, and which questions the fundamental conflict of the artist in society, and the nature and validity of artistic performance like the song. In that respect, Mignon prefigures an important paradigm of later texts which dramatize the singer as a specific kind of musical genius

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<sup>61</sup> *FA IX*, p.958.

<sup>62</sup> *FA IX*, p.650.



at odds with social norms.<sup>63</sup> In the wake of Rousseau and late 18<sup>th</sup> -century sentimental writing, Mignon defies the simplistic idealism associated with song – but more importantly, she defies idealist notions of female song and of woman as the embodiment of sublime song, that we find in the theories and literary texts outlined earlier. Looking back at chapters 2 and 3, it becomes evident that, although she plays with stereotypical images associated with female song, Mignon does not serve a binary reading of either professional performer or idealized muse, nor does she comply with the simplicity implied by 18<sup>th</sup>-century song aesthetics but constitutes a very strong case of poetic genius expressed through song. Drawing on the more interesting, darker aspects of the theories relating to the singing voice, Goethe creates in Mignon a certain kind of pathological ‘completeness’; a complex, paradoxical human instrument, yet also the potentially ‘freest’ and most powerful of all instruments.<sup>64</sup> Mignon is indeed a symbol of poetry and art, in its inexpressible, sublime completeness – yet it is this poetic paradox that Goethe chooses to catalyse through the image of the singer and her song, and the irreconcilability of Mignon’s lyricism with the narrative context of the prose novel.

Yet how far can we discuss Mignon as a ‘woman singer’, especially given her highly androgynous nature? In what sense can she be regarded as an important archetype who sets the tone for subsequent treatments of specifically female song? In addition to the symbolism of her songs, Mignon displays a rather interesting take on the question of her gender as well as her performance, which account for Goethe’s continuous work on the character and an indisputable drive for complexity and subversion. As I have made explicit in the above discussion of Mignon’s songs, Goethe takes the question of woman and song further and has Mignon defy traditional notions of song and gender performance.

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<sup>63</sup> Madame de Staël already deals with this problem, as do the subsequent authors in chapters 5 to 7.

<sup>64</sup> Hegel regards the singing voice as ‘das freieste und seinem Klang nach vollständigste Instrument’. (*Ästhetik*, II, p.291).

## Gender and Performance

Goethe deliberately plays with Mignon's gender, in particular in the novel's first version, the *Theatralische Sendung*, where he refers to the character as (grammatically) masculine, feminine or neuter. In the *Lehrjahre*, the grammatical confusion disappears, and the author crafts Mignon's androgyny more subtly, as part of her overall performance and especially her rejection of her environment. Although she is considered an archetype of androgyny, it must be noted that the later Mignon is referred to as female and that her interpretation outside the novel has always been that of a female character. However, Goethe performs through her a unique vision of gender, which is certainly emphasized by his choice to transform her from Wilhelm's mouthpiece (*Sendung*) into an autonomous singer (*Lehrjahre*). Behind the purist, idealised lyricism of her songs stands a highly controversial singer who, androgynous, defies clear, simplistic notions of gender. Within the narrative constellations, it is important to note that Mignon is juxtaposed not only with Natalie, to whom she literally loses her song, but most importantly with the actress Philine who embodies a more traditional vision of female song with regard to contemporary culture. An erotic, Venus-like figure, Philine represents the light, almost trivial side of song, performing highly sensual, joyous lieder, and barely disguising an overly developed sexuality which, in the contrasting case of Mignon, is pathologically suppressed. On the only occasion that Mignon seeks sexual contact with Wilhelm, hoping to complement her consuming love for him with the appropriate physical expression, she is literally 'outrun' by Philine who, quicker, more sensual and more feminine, manages to get into Wilhelm's bed before her. This pivotal trauma hastens Mignon's increasing distance from Wilhelm as it confirms her status as asocial and quasi-bodiless. Philine's songs constitute positive counterparts to the sombre songs of Mignon and the harpist.

Mignon does not embody androgyny in its ideal state, despite the fact that she contains the idea(l) of completeness implied by the androgynous and that the performance of her songs, untranscribable and accompanied by her lyre, does convey a



strong symbolic, sublime quality.<sup>65</sup> Rather, longing for a lost utopia in her songs as well as for her true, genderless existence, she appears as a troubled character, distanced from the idealism of the divine child, even more so as the author does gender her as female and develop her along the lines of troubled femininity and gender codes forced upon the character who is presumed to be female by everyone. A conscious effort of gendering Mignon according to traditional patterns of femininity is made by her surroundings, notably the Tower Society that tries to coax the girl into proper feminine socialization, dress and behaviour. Yet not only does Mignon violently reject female clothing and any form of identification as a girl, but she ultimately discards all signs of femininity, or general gendering, in her swansong. When the narrator contrasts her 'Frauengewande' and long, loose locks with the remark that the girl looks like an 'abgeschiedner Geist', he makes the rift between the rivalling stances on Mignon's gender and her status within the novel quite clear.<sup>66</sup> The apparently pacified, feminized Mignon who satisfies her surroundings (letting them believe in her final recovery), barely disguises a doomed creature whose physical rejection of earthly categories is imminent. Although it is not straightforward to pinpoint Mignon specifically as a 'woman singer' in the traditional, and later the professional sense of the term, due to the complexity of her lyrical and symbolical quality, the problem of her songs is intertwined with the problem of her gender and her status in the novel, even though any attempt at explaining either song or gender may fall short of the higher principle that Goethe alludes to through this character. Yet her symbolic quality and the mystery that surrounds her and her songs refer explicitly back to 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideals of female song and Goethe's own fascination with it.

Mignon's hard-to-classify performances are unlike traditional, contemporary depictions of the woman singer and starkly contradict traditional associations with female song, as outlined earlier. Mignon is neither a dilettante performing in a salon setting, nor is she an operatic diva basking in self-glorification, or 'exuding'

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<sup>65</sup> See Dornheim, pp.320ff; Emrich, pp.43ff; Delcourt, p.228. Interestingly, Mignon is the only 'female' of Goethe's genius figures.

<sup>66</sup> *FA IX*, p.905.

immorality. Her song performance conveys a sublime, unmediated lyrical genius that expresses everything the singer has to say to her audience without actually being able to communicate this on the page. Thus, she appears as an incarnation of the ideal of song without, however, becoming truly objectified as either woman-music or a staged singer by the listener and onlooker, since she employs certain strategies in order to resist appropriation of herself and her song by the prosaic environment. The mysterious, paradoxical core of her poetic message is Mignon's measure for self-protection and preservation, rejecting rational attempts at deciphering her as a poetic symbol.

Secondly, rejection and self-preservation occur on the performative level, too, because Mignon's performance underlines the subversive, resisting force she deploys through her music and words – quite literally, Mignon is always moving about, which makes it hard for her surroundings actually to fix her into any kind of static pose reminiscent of the 'woman with the lyre'<sup>67</sup> or the salon performer, who is prone to being idealized as the incarnation of female music and song but who lacks the agency of the autonomous singer. A glorification such as Goethe created for his muse Corona is hardly imaginable for Mignon.

Throughout the novel, Mignon hardly ever stands still. She is introduced to the reader as a jumping, dancing member of wandering artist troupes, who continues her unusual movements and tricks even after she has been freed and adopted by Wilhelm. Though pledging allegiance to Wilhelm, Mignon still comes and goes as she pleases, surfacing from nowhere and disappearing without a trace, jumping up and down staircases and climbing onto high places effortlessly: 'In allem seinem Tun und Lassen hatte das Kind etwas sonderbares. Es ging die Treppe weder auf noch ab, sondern sprang; es stieg auf den Geländen der Gänge weg, und eh' man sich's versah, saß es oben auf dem Schranke, und blieb eine Weile ruhig'.<sup>68</sup> Goethe goes as far as ascribing to her the physicality of a doll or marionette, which tends to move mechanically,

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<sup>67</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>68</sup> *FA* IX, p.463.



disregarding human behaviour completely.<sup>69</sup> The famous scene of Mignon's Fandango performance sees her dance around the eggs blindfolded, not at all in a graceful, soft and feminine manner, but rather mechanically, sober, strictly, like clockwork.<sup>70</sup> In the similarly awkward scene after the Hamlet premiere, Mignon asserts various stages of unorthodox behaviour, progressing from the stage of the 'puppet' to that of the wild, aggressive maenad who can no longer be controlled by society and who finishes by biting Wilhelm's arm.<sup>71</sup> It is only towards the end, in Mignon's swansong, that Goethe provides a more static and visual impression of the singer through the bias of Natalie. Not surprisingly, this particular image of Mignon as an angel significantly inspired 19<sup>th</sup>-century iconography and became the character's 'lyre lady' moment.<sup>72</sup> From the point of view of narrative performance, it is only then that Mignon becomes fixed in the pose of the angel, a pose which is ironically broken by her song's words about her true nature as opposed to her appearance. Likewise, it is towards her end that Mignon, anticipating her physical death, affirms outward stillness:

Mignon klettert und springt nicht mehr, und doch fühlt sie noch immer die Begierde, über die Gipfel der Berge wegzuspazieren, von einem Haus aufs andere, von einem Baum auf den andern zu schreiten. Wie beneidenswert sind die Vögel, besonders wenn sie so artig und vertraulich ihre Nester bauen.<sup>73</sup>

Goethe elaborates the elementary conflict of Mignon's absolute lyrical message with a body that defies human principles in the course of the character's development: as such, Mignon's contradictory singing body, her defiance of clichéd song poses and the onlooker's/listener's difficulty in coping with her performances undermine traditional, conservative models of female song while reinforcing the subversive, polemic potential contained in song, between poetic ideal and physical performance. As

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<sup>69</sup> Traditionally, Goethe scholars ascribe these characteristic traits to Mignon's function as a symbol and link to Wilhelm's past, his love for marionette theatre, and for Mariane (see Fick, 'Mignon', pp.10ff; Ammerlahn, *Imagination und Wahrheit*, pp.74-96).

<sup>70</sup> 'Streng, scharf, trocken, heftig, und in sanften Stellungen mehr feierlich als angenehm, zeigte sie sich'. (FA IX, p.469).

<sup>71</sup> FA IX, pp.694-96.

<sup>72</sup> See Grewe, pp.312ff; Wilhelm von Schadow provided perhaps the best-known painting of Mignon as a Romantic allegory during her last song (ibid., pp.314ff.).

<sup>73</sup> FA IX, p.908.

a female singer and a child of genius, Mignon sets the tone for later literary treatments of the artist, like Staël's Corinne, Hoffmann's dissonant musicians or the genius singers of the July Monarchy, for instance Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's Domenica.<sup>74</sup> One could argue that Goethe prefigures in Mignon characteristics of the Romantic *Künstlerliebe*,<sup>75</sup> since her love for Wilhelm is expressed exclusively through song and poeticized through the singer's genius, into the realm of art. Goethe may not have written Mignon specifically to portray the fate of a woman singer, but he certainly chose to transpose the problem of poetry and its inherent symbolism onto a paradoxical artist figure like Mignon, reinforcing this problem through the use of song. Through his treatment of poetic genius along the lines of song ideals and gender disputes, he created an archetypal blueprint for later texts. It is crucial to note that Goethe not only created in Mignon a poetic symbol, but was aware of her potential for a controversial, subversive gender performance and a body which defies simplistic notions of femininity. Like her proto-linguistic songs, Mignon herself appears as a genuine prototype, beyond categories of child or woman, neuter or gendered, genius or puppet, angel or daemon. Autonomous in her performance, this singer's psychological, emotional and artistic state of mind barely changes throughout the novel, yet at the same time, she delivers a highly fluid, shifting gender performance at the hands of her author, who deliberately leaves doubt over both her musical and female identity. Mignon gave rise to some very direct critical and literary responses by both German and French Romantics, who dramatized the female character as an incarnation of music and poetry,<sup>76</sup> an exotic child,<sup>77</sup> or treated the message of lyrical otherness that Mignon

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<sup>74</sup> See chapter 7.

<sup>75</sup> Again, this concept will find a very strong expression in later texts, especially in Hoffmann's work. See chapter 6.

<sup>76</sup> For instance Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) and Dorothea Schlegel's *Florentin* (1802).

<sup>77</sup> Such Mignon figures occur in Clemens Brentano's *Die mehreren Wehmüller und Ungarische Nationalgesichter* (1817), Caroline von Wolzogen's *Agnes von Lilien* (1798) or Immermann's *Die Epigonen* (1836). Mignon's exotism was equally appealing to non-German writers: Walter Scott, *Pevekil of the Peak* (1822); Théophile Gautier, *Albertus* (1832), *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (1863). Gautier was especially enthusiastic about Mignon's 'gypsiness': 'Mignon, Fenella, Esméralda, tour à tour caressées par Goethe, Walter Scott et Victor Hugo prouvent l'amour des âmes poétiques pour ce caractère fier et libre qui donne tout au hasard et réveille dans les esprits les mieux réglés un sourd instinct d'indépendance et de vie errante' (*La Presse*, 02.10.1843).



implied. Rather interesting and complex treatments of female song are to be found in Bettina Brentano's appropriation of the Mignon figure for the creation of her own lyrical self,<sup>78</sup> or Sophie Mereau's exploration of professional female artistry,<sup>79</sup> yet Mignon was also trivialized in the spirit of the *Harfenmädchen* in certain German and French texts,<sup>80</sup> or in fine arts. Composers in particular responded to Mignon's musical-poetic quality, and it is perhaps in music itself that the enigma of Mignon received its most accurate expression.

If Mignon found her way posthumously into European folklore, the controversy of song and gender as developed through her set a particularly strong example for subsequent singer narratives. What we shall see in the following discussion of Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, but also in the subsequent chapters, is that the fundamental contradiction which Goethe created through Mignon continues to resonate in later singer narratives and determine the literary reflection on the singer between song ideals, gender and performance issues.

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<sup>78</sup> Bettina Brentano von Arnim, *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835).

<sup>79</sup> See her novellas *Marie* (1798), and *Die Flucht nach der Hauptstadt* (1806), both written under Mereau's impression of *Wilhelm Meister*.

<sup>80</sup> For example in Eichendorff's writing, in Ary Scheffer's series of Mignon paintings (1836), Saint-Germain's popular *Mignon: légende* (1857) and Ambroise Thomas' opera *Mignon* (1866).

## (2) A French Soul Mate? Madame de Staël and *Corinne, ou l'Italie*

So viel wirst du mir zugeben, daß es der Mühe wert ist, sie zu kennen: denn man kann sich nur einen Begriff von ihr durch sich selbst machen, indem es ein so höchst merkwürdiges Individuum ist, bei dessen Schilderung man immer in Lob und Tadel das Maß verfehlt'.<sup>81</sup>

### The Genesis of a Female Myth

An important work which stands in the wake of Goethe's *Bildungsroman* and at the same time creates a very distinct vision of female song is Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie*,<sup>82</sup> which may be regarded as the starting novel for French Romanticism, in particular the genre of artist novel. A long-time admirer of the famous 'auteur de Werther', Madame de Staël, the woman of genius exiled under Napoleon, travelled to Weimar in late 1803.<sup>83</sup> Engaging in a vivid exchange with the German intelligentsia, most notably Schiller and Goethe, as well as August Wilhelm Schlegel (who would become a constant companion), she became acquainted with and deeply enthusiastic about German aesthetics and the emerging ideals of Romanticism. It was equally in Weimar that she saw a representation of the *Saálnix Singspiel* in February 1804,<sup>84</sup> one of the many popular adaptations of the siren myth. It is well known that this episode, as well as the inspiration she found in German culture and thought prompted her to write about a female artist at odds with the world: 'Hier j'ai fait un nouveau plan de roman en voyant une pièce d'imagination et de féerie tout à fait remarquable. Singulier peuple ces

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<sup>81</sup> Goethe's letter to Knebel, 2.7.1808 (*WA* IV.20, p.106).

<sup>82</sup> *Corinne, ou l'Italie, Œuvres littéraires*, tome III, ed. Simone Balayé (Paris: Champion, 2000) (hereafter *OL* III).

<sup>83</sup> One of the famous and most illuminating contemporary accounts is Karl August Böttiger's *Literarische Zustände und Zeitgenossen: Begegnungen und Gespräche im klassischen Weimar*, ed. Klaus Gerlach/René Sternke (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> The genesis of *Corinne* has been well-documented, due to the author's own carnets and letters as well as to very detailed studies by the leading Staël scholar Simone Balayé. See her prefaces to the 2000 and 1985 edition of *Corinne*; *ibid.*, *Les Carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël, contribution à la genèse de ses œuvres* (Genève: Droz, 1971), p.97; Geneviève Gennari, *Le Premier voyage de Madame de Staël en Italie et la genèse de Corinne* (Paris: Boivin, 1947).



Allemands qui, le plus naturellement du monde, ont une imagination tout à fait romanesque'.<sup>85</sup> The anecdote relating to the genesis of *Corinne* in the German context of the *Singspiel* points towards an important aspect of Madame de Staël's Italian artist, who is from the beginning situated within the realm of cultural and artistic hybridity, a topic of great importance to the author. With additional inspiration taken from the siren myth,<sup>86</sup> Madame de Staël creates Corinne as a woman and an artist, and thus with a strong implication of the double otherness of music and femininity. Corinne shares with Mignon the very pronounced imaginary of song, femininity and the struggle of the genius artist in conflict with society. Like Goethe, Madame de Staël (a Rousseauesque at heart) was partial to music and reflected on the nature and status of music and song as integral elements of human expression and artistic genius, on speech and silence, poetry and performance as well as the question of gender. In her treatise *De l'Allemagne*, she provided pertinent remarks on music, yet it is through *Corinne*, 'conceived' in Germany and carried out in Italy that she created her most striking comment on female genius and music. While scholars have never explicitly compared Mignon and Corinne, it is important to note that Madame de Staël, who did not appreciate *Wilhelm Meister* as such,<sup>87</sup> was rather enthusiastic about the Italian girl Mignon and found access to the poetry of her lieder and to her psyche, which under its apparent simplicity hides something much deeper and more disturbing:

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<sup>85</sup> *Correspondance Générale*, ed. Béatrice W. Jasinski, 6 vols. (Paris: Pauvert, 1960-1993), V/1, p.215 (hereafter *CG*). The letter to her father Jacques Necker also tells of her already more advanced project to write a book on Germany, which would eventually become *De l'Allemagne*, a crucial work for French Romanticism.

<sup>86</sup> In Weimar, Madame de Staël translates Goethe's poem *Der Fischer*, which is part of the *Saálnix* representation, twice, in a verse and prose version, and also refers to it in *Corinne*: 'Goethe a peint, dans une délicieuse romance, ce penchant que l'on éprouve pour les eaux, au milieu de la chaleur. La nymphe du fleuve vante au pêcheur le charme de ses flots: elle l'invite a s'y rafraîchir, et, séduit par degrés, enfin il s'y précipite' (*OL* III, p.340). See Böttiger's remark on Madame de Staël's enthusiasm over the poem (p.366), as well as her *Carnets* (pp.76-77) and discussion of the poem (*DA* II, pp.188-89).

<sup>87</sup> 'Goethe m'a envoyé [...] un roman de lui, nommé 'Willamsmeister' [sic]. Comme il était en allemand, je n'ai pu qu'admirer la reliure (et Benjamin assure entre nous que je suis mieux partagée que lui qui l'a lu)'. (letter to Henri Meister, 22.04. 1797, *CG* IV, p.59). In *De l'Allemagne*, Madame de Staël barely warms up to the novel: 'mais si l'on se met à peindre les situations romanesques avec le calme impartial d'Homère, le résultat ne saurait être très attachant'. (*DA* III, p.258). German scholars in particular have commented on Staël's overall misunderstanding of Goethe (see for example Bernhard Böschstein, 'Madame de Staël, Goethe und Rousseau', in *Goethezeit, Studien zur Erkenntnis und Rezeption Goethes und seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (München: Francke Verlag, 1981).

Il y a je ne sais quelle simplicité magique en elle qui suppose des abîmes de pensées et de sentiments; l'on croit entendre gronder l'orage au fond de son âme, lors même qu'on ne saurait citer ni une parole ni une circonstance qui motive l'inquiétude inexprimable qu'elle fait éprouver.<sup>88</sup>

Humboldt compared the two characters positively,<sup>89</sup> while August Wilhelm Schlegel, almost echoing his brother Friedrich's commentary on the 'poetic' novel *Wilhelm Meister*, reviewed *Corinne* as a true incarnation of poetry and of the poetic essence.<sup>90</sup> Yet what strikes us most of all in *Corinne* is that, unlike many contemporary imitations of Mignon that eventually developed either a simplified or a clichéd version of the figure, by prioritizing traits like Mignon's exoticism or the pose of the harp girl, Madame de Staël, whether consciously drawing on Goethe's character or not, chose a different approach. Although clearly drawing on Rousseauesque musical aesthetics, as well as dealing with a similar blend of woman and music to that found in Goethe, Staël manages to create a character entirely unique and new, a strong statement of female musicality and artistic genius which constituted a provocatively strong stance on such issues as early as 1807. If Mignon's song continues to resonate in subsequent authors, Madame de Staël nevertheless takes the question of the singer's performance and realism further than Goethe, setting the tone for the Romantic treatment of the woman singer, and inspiring a considerable number of male and female-authored texts that rewrote the Corinne myth throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the following case study, we will see how exactly Madame de Staël develops Corinne as a multi-faceted artistic genius and to what extent, in the wake of Goethe, she creates a new female archetype for 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts to come. How does Staël elaborate the dilemma of female musicality through the traits of Corinne?

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<sup>88</sup> *DA* III, p.257.

<sup>89</sup> See Balayé, *Madame de Staël: Ecrire, lutter, vivre* (Genève: Droz, 1994), p.252. Humboldt writes to Staël on 3.6.1807: 'J'ai reçu il y a huit jours à peu près votre Corinne [...] Je n'ai fait depuis que lire votre ouvrage' (cit. in Balayé, 'Corinne et les amis de Madame de Staël', *RHL*, 1966, p.140).

<sup>90</sup> Schlegel, 'Une Etude critique de *Corinne ou l'Italie*', *CS* (16.06.1973), pp.58-59.



## Existing Scholarship

Madame de Staël shares with Goethe the fact that scholars refrain from giving her any substantial credit as a ‘musical’ writer who made an important contribution to musical-literary aesthetics,<sup>91</sup> though, as in Goethe’s case, it is in fact difficult to avoid talking about Staël and her works in the context of the musical-literary discourse of the 1800s.<sup>92</sup> The onset of serious Staël criticism since the 1960s has also engendered more detailed, thematically specific studies on *Corinne* and her various implications, such as the question of music and of the female voice.<sup>93</sup> A number of studies deals with the central problems of Staël’s character, notably the author’s concept of female genius<sup>94</sup> as expressed through Corinne, or the motif of the woman poet<sup>95</sup> and female performer.<sup>96</sup> An already existing (but by no means exhaustive) critical corpus on Madame de Staël’s

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<sup>91</sup> For studies on Staël and music see Fernand Baldensperger, *Sensibilité musicale et romantisme* (Paris: Paillart/Les Presses Françaises, 1925); Jean Ménard, ‘Madame de Staël et la musique. Avec des documents inédits’, *RUO*, 1961 (31), 420-35; 552-63. Marie Naudin, ‘Madame de Staël précurseur de l’esthétique musicale romantique’, *RSH*, 137 (1970/1-3), 391-400; Nicolas Perot, *Discours sur la musique à l’époque de Chateaubriand* (Paris: PUF, 2000).

<sup>92</sup> See chapter 1, n.7.

<sup>93</sup> Standard works include: ‘*Un deuil éclatant de bonheur*’. *Corinne ou l’Italie. Madame de Staël*, ed. Jean-Pierre Perchellet (Orléans: Paradigmes, 1999); ‘*Une mélodie intellectuelle*’: *Corinne ou l’Italie de Germaine de Staël*, ed. Christine Planté/Christine Pouzoulet/Alain Vaillant (Montpellier: Centre d’étude du XIXe siècle, Université Paul-Valéry, 2000); *The Novel’s Seductions. Staël’s Corinne in Critical Enquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: BUP; London: AUP, 1999); Studies focused specifically on music include Balayé, ‘La Fonction romanesque de la musique et des sons dans Corinne’, *Romantisme*, 3 (1972), 16-32; Boon, ‘Women Performing Music’; Anne Deneys-Tunney, ‘*Corinne* by Madame de Staël: the Utopia of Feminine Voice as Music Within the Novel’, *DFS*, XXVIII (1994), 55-63.

<sup>94</sup> Claudine Herrmann, ‘Corinne, femme de génie’, *CS*, 35 (1984-1), 60-76; Claire Dehon, ‘Corinne, une artiste héroïne de roman’, *NFS*, 9 (1980-81), 1-9. Gayle Levy, ‘A Genius for the modern Area: Madame de Staël’s *Corinne*’, *NFS*, 30 (2002), 242-53.

<sup>95</sup> Christine Planté, ‘Sur les improvisations de *Corinne*’, in ‘*Une mélodie intellectuelle*’, pp.61-79; Madelyn Gutwirth, ‘Du silence de Corinne et de sa parole’, in ‘*Un deuil éclatant de bonheur*’, pp.171-80; Christine Planté, ‘Ce qui parle en moi vaut mieux que moi-même’: improvisation et poésie’, in *Corinne. Madame de Staël, Corinne ou l’Italie: ‘L’âme se mêle à tout’*, ed. José-Luis Diaz (Paris: SEDES, 1999), 89-99.

<sup>96</sup> Cornelia Klettke, ‘Germaine de Staël: Corinne ou l’Italie: Grenzüberschreitung und Verschmelzung der Künste im Sinne der frühromantischen Universalpoesie’, in *ROF*, 115/2 (2003), 171-93. Karyna Szmurlo, ‘Le Jeu et le discours féminin: la danse de l’héroïne staëlienne’, in ‘*Un deuil éclatant de bonheur*’, pp.77-90; Simone Balayé, ‘*Corinne* en spectacle’, *Littératures*, 41 (Autumn 1999), 97-109; François Brunet, ‘Le Jeu de l’acteur selon Madame de Staël: de Corinne à Talma’, in ‘*Une mélodie intellectuelle*’: 81-106. Catriona Seth, ‘A sa voix, tout sur la terre se change en poésie’: les improvisations dans *Corinne*, in ‘*Un deuil éclatant de bonheur*’, 131-54.

rapport with Germany<sup>97</sup> has been enriched in recent years by various comparative studies on the author and her work, which recognize Madame de Staël's now undeniable status as a fixture of the literary canon and key figure of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought.<sup>98</sup>

## Creating the Female Artist of Genius

En ce moment, il n'est question que de *Corinne*. Le duc en a fait venir un exemplaire sur la demande de Goethe, il l'a en mains depuis peu de jours et il paraît en être émerveillé. Il loue cet ouvrage sans aucune réserve et en est aussi enthousiasmé que vous l'êtes vous-même.<sup>99</sup>

### Synopsis

*Feeling responsible for his father's sudden death, the Scottish lord Oswald Nelvil embarks on a journey to Italy in order to cure his melancholy. In Rome, he meets the mysterious artist and proclaimed genius Corinne and falls in love with her. Cured through Corinne's art and enthusiasm, Oswald is nevertheless divided over his wish to marry her, as she turns out to be the half-Italian daughter of his father's friend, deemed too artistic and liberal to become Oswald's wife and live in England with him. Returning to England and giving in to the paternal taboo, Oswald finally marries Corinne's younger half-sister Lucile, leaving the artist grief-stricken and slowly wasting away from her betrayed love. Years later, Oswald and Lucile return to Italy with their daughter Juliette in order to cure Oswald's recurring melancholia, and to be*

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<sup>97</sup> Fernand Baldensperger, *Goethe en France: étude de littérature comparée* (Paris: Hachette, 1920); Ernst Behler, *Frau von Staël in Weimar. Mit neuen Quellen und Dokumenten* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992); Marie-Madeleine Martinet, *Le Voyage d'Italie dans les littératures européennes* (Paris: PUF, 1996).

<sup>98</sup> Linda Lewis, *Germaine de Staël, George Sand, and the Victorian Woman Artist*. (Columbia: UMP, 2003); Erica Cocke, 'Corinne and Consuelo: The Woman Artist in Dialogue with the World', in *Le Siècle de George Sand*, ed. David Powell/Shira Malkin (Amsterdam: Rodopi; 1998): 247-52. Virginie Wortmann-Lacouronne, *Germaine de Staël und George Sand: eine inhaltliche Untersuchung über den Einfluss ihrer Frauenromane auf zeitgenössische deutsche Autorinnen* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 1997); Jean Murait, 'Das Novalis-Bild der französischen Romantik von Madame de Staël bis Xavier Marmier', in *Gallo-Germanica: Wechselwirkungen und Parallelen deutscher und französischer Literatur (18.- 20. Jahrhundert)*, ed. E.Heftrich/J.-M. Valentin (Nancy: PUN, 1986); Martha Kaarsberg Wallach, 'George Sand und Germaine de Staël in Heines Spätwerk', *HJB*, 29 (1990), 29-53; Ellen Moers, 'Performing Heroism: The Myth of Corinne', in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge: Harvard English Studies, 1975), pp.319-50.

<sup>99</sup> Christine Reinhard's letter to her mother, 5.7.1807 (*Une Femme de diplomate. Lettres de madame Reinhard à sa mère 1798-1815*, transl./ed. Baronne de Wimpffen (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1900), p.333.



*reconciled with Corinne. Corinne symbolically passes on her gift to Juliette and, after a last performance, dies in Oswald's presence.*

As a distinctive type of female artistry which perfects various gifts, the essence of Corinne can be traced back to long-standing traditions of female performers while re-writing and critically reflecting on the position of the woman artist in the context of the 1800s. Among the possible influences on Corinne is the Greek classical poet Corinna as well as her modern counterpart, the Roman *improvisatrice* Corilla Olimpica.<sup>100</sup> Within the literary realm, scholars have pointed towards Isabelle de Charrière's heroine *Caliste* and Madame de Krüdener's *Valérie*<sup>101</sup> as sources of inspiration – but it is most pertinent in this context to bear in mind the inspiration of Weimar and impressions such as Goethe's *Mignon*, the siren motif and the underlying problem of female song and of the woman artist as 'other' which resonate strongly in Staël's protagonist. As such, the author creates a female protagonist, who appears familiar yet at the same time unique, and who represents a striking display of female artistry.

### The Doubts of Musical Utopia

Though similar to *Mignon* as an artistic genius situated in the realm of musical-poetic otherness, Corinne initially presents a rather different version of female musicality, as we pass from the 'albernes, zwitterhaftes Geschöpf'<sup>102</sup> to the most famous and acclaimed artist of Italy. In sharp contrast to *Mignon*'s ambiguous body of song and to the proto-linguistic state of her *lieder*, Corinne appears as a fully present character, poetic and sensual, multilingual and, rather than belonging nowhere and being unable to communicate properly, she clearly embraces different nationalities, cultures, languages and art forms with an unrivalled capacity for communication and reconciliation of prose

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<sup>100</sup> See Paola Giuli, 'Tracing a Sisterhood: Corilla Olimpica as Corinne's Unacknowledged Alter Ego', in *The Novel's Seductions*, pp.165-84.

<sup>101</sup> Madame de Staël herself was very critical of the novel, referring to it repeatedly in negative terms during her stay in Germany. See her letters to Hochet (17.1.1804, *CG* V/1, p.195) and Necker (10.2.1804, *CG* V/1, p.228).

<sup>102</sup> *FA* IX, p.553.

and poetry. It seems, from the beginning, that Corinne is a fully valid female artist, both in terms of the validity of her poetic message and the realism and legitimacy of her performance, yet also through the Rousseauesque ideal resonating in Mignon, the ideal of song as human communication. Madame de Staël in fact crafts a female genius based on similar principles as Mignon; the mysterious origin of the artist (and of her art), a lack of musical education and professional implication paired with natural genius and a very strong, overall musical-poetic quality. Like Mignon, Corinne is an artist whose genius is focalised through her voice and through those art forms that are closely connected to vocality: Corinne recites and improvises and by doing so, displays a naturally-given, sublime musicality, which underpins her entire character, linking her diverse artistic skills and marking her as a distinct literary embodiment of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical-literary ideals discussed in the previous chapter. Yet Staël also widens Corinne's artistic range and her performance possibilities within the novel, as she equally alters the perception of such an unusual female character. Unlike Mignon, Corinne is presented as perfection herself, an early version of the acclaimed diva who embraces the spotlight and the honour of being crowned Rome's first and finest poet.

The introductory scene sees Corinne arrive at the Capitol in Rome to be crowned the first poet of Italy. During the ceremony, she performs an improvisation on the glory of Italy, accompanying herself on her harp. This constitutes a highly interesting choice on the author's part, since she consciously presents her heroine as a hybrid artist of genius, who navigates the borderline between music and speech, between instrument and human voice, posing as a genuinely orphic figure who creates a utopian space through her song and who, as she asserts herself, confounds all aspects of art and genius, 'amour, religion, génie, et le soleil et les parfums, et la musique et la poésie'.<sup>103</sup> Corinne is unanimously acclaimed for her unique gift, and the difficulty in categorizing her and the unlimited admiration shine through in the public's reactions to her:

L'un disait que sa voix était la plus touchante d'Italie, l'autre que personne ne jouait la tragédie comme elle, l'autre qu'elle dansait comme une nymphe, et qu'elle dessinait

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<sup>103</sup> *OL* III, p.262.



avec autant de grâce que d'invention; tous disaient qu'on n'avait jamais écrit ni improvisé d'aussi beaux vers, et que, dans la conversation habituelle, elle avait tour à tour une grâce et une éloquence qui charmaient tous les esprits.<sup>104</sup>

Madame de Staël at first presents her as a versatile, multi-faceted artist whose improvisations are transcribed in the novel, and who moreover excels in the art forms of dance, theatre and song. In these, Corinne embraces most performative gifts, from the most physical art of dance to acting and more poetic gifts like song and improvisation. The most notable difference from Mignon, which makes Corinne quite modern for her time, is the uncompromisingly positive connotation associated with her art practice, in terms of her own artistic identity and the public's reaction to her. August Wilhelm Schlegel famously commented on the unique artistic synaesthesia that Corinne incarnates:

Tel est le seul privilège de la poésie de réunir en un seul personnage des qualités que l'on a souvent admirées séparément, qui ne se contredisent pas, mais qui, au contraire se mettent en valeur mutuellement et qui peuvent fort bien par une faveur spéciale de la nature se trouver côte à côte. La grâce dont on est doué soi-même invite à aimer tout ce qui est beau; des dispositions pour la musique, la danse et l'art dramatique sont en étroit rapport avec ce don d'improvisations qui caractérise l'inspiration poétique; celle-ci n'atteint sa verve que lorsqu'elle émane des profondeurs de l'esprit et de l'âme et qu'elle sert d'expression à l'élan d'un sentiment élevé.<sup>105</sup>

In fact, Corinne embodies a very ancient poetic spirit, similarly to Mignon's genius that is linked to the genius of the ode and the *Sturm und Drang* and to the Rousseauesque aesthetics of lost song – in Corinne's case, she appears as an *improvisatrice*, a quintessentially orphic figure who embraces speech and musicality, poetry and prose through the performance of her 'chants'. Madame de Staël emphasizes this characteristic through her heroine's trademark improvisations, of which three are transcribed within the novel, much like Mignon's lieder in *Wilhelm Meister*. Not surprisingly, Corinne echoes Mignon's utopian song in her first improvisation:

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<sup>104</sup> OL III, p.24.

<sup>105</sup> Schlegel, 'Une Etude critique', p.59.

‘Connaissez-vous cette terre où les orangers fleurissent?’<sup>106</sup> It is in this first improvisation that Corinne (herself a utopian, female vision of Italy) chants *La gloire et le bonheur d’Italie*, a utopian vision directly created through the woman poet’s voice. An interesting aspect of Corinne’s improvisations is their insertion within the main narrative body – a phenomenon not unlike Goethe’s work with songs in his writing, yet also an aspect for which Madame de Staël has been severely criticized.<sup>107</sup> In contrast to Mignon, Corinne’s does not sing lieder, but improvises while accompanying herself on the harp.<sup>108</sup> Much more so perhaps than Mignon’s *Sturm und Drang* genius of song and the lieder she sings, Corinne’s genius implies the lost art form idealized by Rousseau and others and alludes to the elusive ideal of an original union between music and speech, and the ideal state of the human voice. On a different level, Staël implicitly alludes to such ancient models of female song like the lyrical poets Sappho and Corinna, from whom Corinne partly takes inspiration.

As such, Corinne’s original expression and melody cannot be transcribed in the novel, which provides a merely approximative translation, from Italian verse into French prose, from the oral performance into the narrative discourse, from pure music to the written word.<sup>109</sup> Music remains a signifier for the sublime, but can only find written expression *ex negativo*: ‘Il semble qu’en écoutant des sons purs et délicieux, on est prêt à saisir le secret du Créateur, à pénétrer le mystère de la vie. Aucune parole ne peut exprimer cette impression, car les paroles se traînent après les impressions primitives, comme les traducteurs en prose sur les pas des poètes’.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> OL III, p.39.

<sup>107</sup> Balzac, in his *Illusions perdues*, speaks of ‘ces improvisations qui déparent le roman de *Corinne*’ (*La Comédie humaine*, ed. Pierre-Georges Castex (Paris: Gallimard Pléiade, 1976-1981, vol.V, p.173). See Planté, ‘Sur les improvisations de Corinne’, 61-79; *ibid.*, ‘Ce qui parle en moi vaut mieux que moi-même’. Improvisation et poésie dans *Corinne*, in *Madame de Staël, Corinne ou l’Italie, l’âme se mêle à tout*, pp.89-99.

<sup>108</sup> Corinne’s improvisation is certainly close to Homeric singing and Greek lyrical traditions associated with Sappho and Corinna. See Touliatos, ‘The Traditional Role’, 111-23. Madame de Staël later casts the eponymous heroine with her harp in the play *Sappho* (1811).

<sup>109</sup> There is clearly an attempt from Staël a new genre in the tension between prose and poetry. Seth (‘A sa voix’, pp.135ff.) remarks on the fact that the apparently ‘bad’ translation of Corinne’s genius strengthens the artist’s original sublimity *ex negativo*, by providing only a glimpse of what cannot possibly be translated. As we have seen, a similar phenomenon occurs in Mignon’s lieder.

<sup>110</sup> OL III, p.238.



Clearly, Madame de Staël's lyrical prowess does not match Goethe's refined use of the lied in *Wilhelm Meister* (which rightly inspired composers to set Mignon to music). Yet, it seems that Madame de Staël's objective is also a different one. In fact, what makes her lyrical insertions so remarkable is the experimentation with the novel's narrative conventions in order to mirror her heroine's hybridity and transcendence of boundaries, and which may be able to (more or less approximatively) represent the richness of the poetic genius and her voice, as well as an underlying, omnipresent sense of musicality. Staël was certainly aware of Friedrich Schlegel's remarks on the novel's inherent poetry and its potential 'Vieles zu einem zu verknüpfen, und die Verknüpfung zu einem unbedingt vollständigen Ganzen zu vollenden'.<sup>111</sup> As for August Wilhelm Schlegel, he called Corinne 'un épanchement lyrique de forme libre,' carried by an 'improvisatrice idéale, comme il n'y en a peut-être jamais eu'.<sup>112</sup> It may therefore appear only logical that Madame de Staël should present such an unusual performer, of whose art so little is known and whose transcription within prose must necessarily remain mysterious, as it does no justice to the 'immediate orality' of the character and her performance. The novel's deliberate richness and somewhat experimental nature seems to support this reflection on a hybrid, multi-talented artist, whose most distinctive trait is her inherent musicality and its most tangible expression her voice.<sup>113</sup> Unlike Mignon's defective musicality, a sign of exclusion, Corinne's musicality appears as all-embracing and integrative, which at least for a while creates an atmosphere of musical-poetic utopia within the novel.

By far the most striking aspect of the novel's and its heroine's hybridity occurs on the musical level. It is important to this thesis because Madame de Staël makes ample use of music, as a characteristic trait of her heroine, yet also as a score and structural

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<sup>111</sup> *KFSA*, I, p.296. Sainte-Beuve later states that 'comme art, comme poème, le roman de *Corinne*, à lui seul, présenterait un monument immortel' (*Oeuvres* II, p.1063). Madame de Staël's influence on the evolution of the *poème en prose* remains to be studied in depth. See *La Poésie en prose. Des Lumières au Romantisme (1760-1820)*, pp.118-19.

<sup>112</sup> Schlegel, 'Une Etude critique', p.59.

<sup>113</sup> Highly acclaimed in the German realm, *Corinne* received a rather mixed reception in France, where most of the criticism was aimed at the author herself and the novel's perceived 'invraisemblance' (see for example Féletz' review in the *Journal de l'Empire*, 07./12.05. 1807). See Balayé, 'Corinne et la presse parisienne de 1807', pp.245-63. It is much later that French Romanticism comes back to the concept of hybridity, as conceptualized in Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell*.

element of the text.<sup>114</sup> Music underpins the entire novel, creating an intense bond with the novel's protagonists and their inner states, accompanying Corinne's improvisations, while her voice itself is described as pure music:<sup>115</sup> 'Mais Corinne récitait avec une variété de tons qui ne détruisait pas le charme soutenu de l'harmonie; c'était comme des airs joués tous par un instrument céleste'.<sup>116</sup> All sensual and intellectual perceptions are tied into the musical realm; architecture for example is compared to 'une musique continuelle et fixée'.<sup>117</sup> Most importantly, music is omnipresent in the perception of nature, again inviting comparison with Mignon's utopian poetic space, when Corinne and Oswald are struck by the perfume of the lemon trees, which 'donne une disposition poétique, excite le talent et l'enivre de la nature':<sup>118</sup> 'Ainsi les chants les plus purs se réunissaient aux odeurs les plus suaves; tous les charmes de la nature s'attiraient mutuellement'.<sup>119</sup> Music corresponds to the immediate, spontaneous nature of her gifts, stemming directly from her soul – similarly to Mignon, the music Corinne creates relates to the Rousseauesque concept of unmediated, original musical genius. Thus, music seems to reflect and link two sides of Corinne's genius through which she is able to create and uphold for a while the utopian space of Italy, both for herself and Oswald, and through which she is able to bridge the gaps of silence between them as well as their socio-cultural differences.<sup>120</sup> In this regard, Madame de Staël uses music, more than Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*, as an integrative, healing force able to encompass everything and express the inexpressible of the artistic genius. But more importantly,

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<sup>114</sup> Balayé describes music as a 'courbe dramatique' ('La Fonction', p.2) for the novel, which passes from the crescendo to a decrescendo (p.27) in tune with Corinne's slow demise.

<sup>115</sup> Not surprisingly, Madame de Staël makes use of the Aeolian harp in Corinne's gardens to enhance the bond between nature and music (OL III, p.216), and links music directly to the human soul: 'l'âme vibre alors comme un instrument à l'unisson que briserait une harmonie trop parfaite'. (OL III, p.238)

<sup>116</sup> OL III, p.42. On a different occasion, Corinne comments on the musical essence of acting: 'Il n'est pas de langue dans laquelle un grand acteur put montrer autant de talents que dans la notre, car la mélodie des sons ajoute un nouveau charme à la vérité de l'accent: c'est une musique continuelle qui se mêle à l'expression des sentiments'. (OL III, p.175).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.274.

<sup>120</sup> See Goethe's letter to Zelter: 'Ich habe die Vermutung, dass allem und jedem Kunstsinn der Sinn für Musik beigesellt sein müsse'. (6.9.1827, MA XX.1, p.1036). Madame de Staël ascribes to music the central place within the human psyche: '[La musique seule] s'adresse à la source intime de l'existence' (OL III, p.237); and further onwards: 'Toutes les sensations préparent à la plus profonde de toutes, celle que la musique doit produire'. (OL III, p.254). See chapter 3.



when comparing this vision of music and song with the slightly more abstract aesthetic concepts that I have outlined earlier, Madame de Staël clearly puts the abstract side of music into perspective, and applies it very directly to the artist and her rapport with her environment.

The universal, integrative nature of Corinne's musicality extends to art forms like dance. Whereas Mignon's dance appears as a reclusive, unnatural performance further emphasizing her overall pathology and the rupture between her poetic inner self and her narrative performance, Corinne performs her dance in public, in front of an admiring audience that sees no inappropriateness in this physical display of female genius. During her Tarantella dance, Corinne not only connects directly with the audience through the expression of her own soul, but she once again demonstrates the synaesthesia of arts, in a performance both poetic and physical:

Corinne, en dansant, faisait passer dans l'âme des spectateurs ce qu'elle éprouvait, comme si elle avait improvisé, comme si elle avait joué de la lyre ou dessiné quelques figures; tout était langage pour elle: les musiciens, en la regardant, s'animaient à mieux faire sentir le génie de leur art; et je ne sais quelle joie passionnée, quelle sensibilité d'imagination électrisait à la fois tous les témoins de cette danse magique, et les transportait dans une existence idéale ou l'on rêve un bonheur qui n'est pas de ce monde.<sup>121</sup>

Again, Corinne reconciles various aspects of musical and poetic genius within a distinctively female performance – in this, Madame de Staël creates a concept of female artistic genius both unique and daring, as it contradicts the tenor of aesthetic positions on female musicality and artistry which I have discussed earlier, and uses the female artist as a representative of all-encompassing art, carried by music and by the female voice without spatial limitations. Corinne rightly appears as a female genius, whose distinctive trait, musicality and vocality, reconciles different art forms and creates a temporary performance space for the female artist. In this quality of synaesthesia, Corinne reconciles opposing art concepts, such as the notion of genius as exclusively male and the imagery of the female singer as transgressive and hybrid, and to a certain

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<sup>121</sup> *OL* III, p.131.

extent androgynous. What is more, Corinne bridges the extreme poles of poetic speech and physical performance through her rendition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in yet another key scene exposing her broad artistic talents, as well as her status as a hybrid artist reconciling genius and performance and claiming a public performance space without punishment. However, while acting, Corinne, who like Mignon creates from her heart and her innermost self, already loses the important quality of artistic detachment, that which she so famously paraphrases as a supernatural quality, as the essence of her own genius: 'Je crois éprouver alors un enthousiasme surnaturel, et je sens bien que ce qui parle en moi vaut mieux que moi-même'.<sup>122</sup> As she performs Juliet's love lines towards Romeo, she simultaneously addresses Oswald as herself, her own love nourishing her artistic expression more than her genius, and blurring the lines between art and reality. In consequence, her artistic expression becomes entangled with and compromised by her feelings for the man she has fallen in love with and she fails to differentiate between art and life – this dilemma will become central in later case studies.

Any kind of art is accompanied by music and possesses an inherent musical quality, and Madame de Staël gives the symbiosis between Italy and its music increased attention: 'La nature a destiné cette musique pour ce climat: l'une est comme un reflet de l'autre'.<sup>123</sup> As such, Italy acts as a utopian space on the Scottish Oswald, who is constantly accompanied by the sounds of nature and above all by the musicality of Corinne's voice, creating a most complex vision of the protagonist's voice between prosaic reason and poetic music as the most apt expression of the unspeakable. A barely disguised allegory of Italy (which is further suggested by the novel's title), Corinne embodies the Italian spirit and proclaims, through her improvisation and through her personal demeanour, a utopian attitude that goes as far as to transcend gender boundaries:

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.



Corinne est le lien de ses amis entre eux; elle est le mouvement, l'intérêt de notre vie; nous comptons sur sa bonté; nous sommes fiers de son génie; nous disons aux étrangers: - regardez-la, c'est l'image de notre belle Italie; elle est ce que nous serions sans l'ignorance, l'envie, la discorde et l'indolence auxquelles notre sort nous a condamnés; - nous nous plaçons à la contempler comme une admirable production de notre climat, de nos beaux-arts, comme un rejeton du passé, comme une prophétie de l'avenir; [...] nous serions hommes comme elle est femme, si les hommes pouvaient comme les femmes se créer un monde dans leur propre cœur, et si notre génie, nécessairement dépendant des relations sociales et des circonstances extérieures, pouvait s'allumer tout entier au seul flambeau de la poésie.<sup>124</sup>

While this passage abounds in praise and admiration of Corinne, it also implies an ambiguous poetic quality that already occurred with Mignon and which establishes the problem of the artist from the start: regardless of her artistic genius, and despite her more solid anchoring within a benevolent environment, Corinne is just as much prone to the dangers of a poetic existence and its utopian, hypothetically non-prosaic character. Corinne is what her friends would aspire to be, and what Italy could be if only circumstances were different – as such, Corinne embodies a state of hypothesis and potential which leaves us to question her present state as a woman and artist. As a true woman poet, Corinne creates a world out of her own heart and within her own heart, intimately linked to her genius – yet this state of interiority and auto-genesis through poetry also brings Corinne dangerously close to the exclusive state of Mignon, who, defying the narrative context, is all but her heart, and exclusively ‘sings out’ her heart. Thus, from the beginning, the extremes of poetic genius and vulnerability are present in Corinne, and it is this dichotomy that will characterize her evolution, her doomed love for Oswald and eventual demise within the novel. In a conflict between her artistic nature and its reception by a more or less benevolent exterior Corinne has the choice of either altering her artistic identity or retreating to a Mignon-like state of exclusive (and reclusive) genius. Initially, despite her acclaimed existence in Rome, she appears much closer to the mysterious, quasi-inhuman genius which has no place in a prosaic environment. It equally seems to bode ill from the start that, as a true artistic genius,

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31. This emphasis on the *italianité*, and its implied remark on the difference between North and South, in terms of climate, character, art and genius will be further developed in Staël's *De l'Allemagne*.

Corinne's origins remain mysterious, as she seems to have emerged out of nowhere into the spotlight.<sup>125</sup> Gradually, as the poetic child in *Meister* is explained and appropriated by a prosaic environment, so does Corinne compromise her gift under the effect of her love for Oswald. Although her voice continues to win Oswald over, she discloses her past to him in writing (another insertion into the novel entitled 'Histoire de Corinne'), and it is that past, in written form, which makes their union impossible, and which creates a fundamental conflict within the woman artist, between the utopia she creates through her art in the present, and the past catching up with her and compromising this poetic utopia.

As such, Corinne has to negotiate different ideals and ideas of body and voice, divine genius and earthly attachments. She may at the start be stronger than Mignon, more present and more asserted; yet her dilemma eventually becomes the same struggle between poetics and performance. However, it is striking to note to what extent the author uses difficult areas like dance and theatre as part of Corinne's overall poetics. Corinne is neither a *fille d'opéra* nor an *actrice*, the latter placing a stigma on Madame de Charrière's protagonist *Caliste*, despite a similar gift of musical incarnation.<sup>126</sup> Seemingly free of the constraints and the ambiguity placed upon female musicality and performance that I have discussed in the previous two chapters, Corinne, across all genres, appears entirely poetic and noble in her performances. Unlike Mignon, her gender is clearly defined, and the author presents the woman artist as a figure of genius capable of reconciling disparate female art forms regardless of their connotations or stigmata. This rings even more true with regard to the ideals and pragmatics of song.

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<sup>125</sup> 'Son nom de famille était ignoré. Son premier ouvrage avait paru cinq ans auparavant, et portait seulement le nom de Corinne. Personne ne savait où elle avait vécu, ni ce qu'elle avait été avant cette époque' (*OL* III, p.24).

<sup>126</sup> 'J'ai toujours trouvé qu'elle jouait et chantait comme on parle ou comme on devrait parler, et comme elle parlait elle-même' (Charrière, *Œuvres complètes* VIII, p.192).



## From Improvisation to Opera: The Ambivalence of the Artist's Voice

Corinne's genius becomes most pronounced whenever she speaks, more precisely, in the various ways in which, through her voice, she conveys the idea of poetry – in this *poeticity*, she covers a very broad vocal range, from improvisation to opera, passing through different types of songs and lieder, such as Scottish romances and Venetian barcarolles,<sup>127</sup> as well as closely associated art forms like dance and theatre. Thus, Madame de Staël emphasizes her heroine's distinct vocality as a hybrid, all-encompassing gift which shines regardless of genre and performance context. Corinne is not easily classified according to song ideals or performance spaces outlined in the previous chapters. Much more than Mignon, in whom Goethe dramatizes the problem of poetic genius, Corinne challenges traditional limits of poetry and of performance, from musical speech and simple song to operatic arias, between the privacy of her salon and the publicity of the Roman stage or the Venetian opera house. Looking back at the musical-literary discourse of the time, especially the dogma of idealized female song and the rift between the musical-feminine ideal and the singer per se shows to what extent Corinne, though drawing on certain musical aesthetics, questions them as far as the woman singer is concerned – a critical questioning focalised through the heroine's own voice.

It is this voice, in its genius, integrative and synaesthetic power which becomes most affected through Corinne's relationship with Oswald, marked by the artist's increasing struggle between her poetic self and the pragmatic expectations placed upon her, a struggle which gradually causes her to compromise her artistic gift and eventually lose the voice that best expressed this gift.

'La poésie de Corinne est une mélodie intellectuelle'.<sup>128</sup> This is perhaps one of the most striking sentences that the author uses to describe the unorthodox nature of her heroine's vocality and the evolution she goes through. More than a mere performer and poetic vessel, Corinne appears to fully own her performance and her words, as she

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<sup>127</sup> *OL* III, p.405

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

repeatedly engages in analytical, rational conversations over her art. Thus, Corinne reconciles male and female discourse, as well as two disparate concepts of female musicality, and of 'natural' and 'intellectual' art concepts, since she appears both as an incarnation of music (and of Italy, in itself musical), and as the owner of the musical discourse and performance. Thus, she claims the status of the poet as subject (a position gendered male) – in mythological terms, Corinne reunites the position of the sirens and of Odysseus/Homer. Corinne confidently says of herself 'Je suis poète'<sup>129</sup> – navigating the line between the immediate, oral nature of her lyrical performance and rational agency, Corinne gradually evolves into a different type of poet: As her relationship with Oswald deteriorates and her artistic identity becomes increasingly compromised through her emotions, a rift occurs in her ability to embrace and reconcile the oral and physical quality of her performances with her rational, narrative faculties. She loses her gift for improvisation and performing, regressing into personal isolation and developing a more pronounced written identity, trying to cope with her fate through writing. However, the written 'je lyrique' betrays the extent of her suffering on the borderline of madness.<sup>130</sup> However dramatic her loss of original genius may appear in the novel, Corinne has the advantage over Mignon of being able to rationalize her gifts and, to a certain extent, blend into the narrative discourse.

In an ironic twist, the author presents Corinne at her boldest vocally and in terms of performance as she is about to lose Oswald forever, realizing the impossibility of reconciling social expectations of femininity with her own poetic self.<sup>131</sup> During a stay in Venice, Corinne is asked to perform the lead role of the Amazon queen in Gozzi's opéra-comique *La fille de l'air*, a role which again plays with gender stereotypes and emphasizes Corinne's status beyond binary gender categories. Due to the unique character of the opera demanding both musical and theatrical talent, Corinne is able to

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57

<sup>130</sup> 'La 'chute' dans l'écrit laisse carrière à son œuvre de ruine' (Florence Lotterie, 'La puissance d'aimer : progrès et sensibilité dans *Corinne ou l'Italie*, in 'Une mélodie intellectuelle', p.124). Both Lotterie and Planté ('Sur les improvisations') remark on Corinne's important transition from a predominantly oral to a written existence.

<sup>131</sup> The author aptly entitles book XVI, the beginning of the Venice episode 'Le départ et l'absence' (*OL* III, p.404).



shine and employ her talent for improvisation. Interestingly, she is reluctant to show Oswald this facet of her gift, the comedic side and her ability to perform on stage as if she truly was a professional opera singer. It is evident that Madame de Staël is well aware of the implications of the female opera performance. Nevertheless, her portrayal of Corinne's performance positively emphasizes Corinne's ability to embrace popular art with nobility, since her genius and unique status place her outside social and performances norms and the eventual stigma associated with opera: 'Ses gestes, accompagnés par la musique, étaient comiques et nobles tout à la fois; elle faisait rire sans cesser d'être imposante, et son rôle et son talent dominaient les acteurs et les spectateurs, en se moquant avec grâce des uns et des autres'.<sup>132</sup> Though Corinne is able still to mock her colleagues on stage and the audience's expectations, the comical tone of the opera fuels the irony of a basically tragic scene in which Corinne is able to uphold her professional performance only until the curtain call:

Ce moment était peut-être celui de sa vie ou la crainte de la douleur avait été le plus loin d'elle; mais tout à coup elle vit Oswald qui, ne pouvant plus se contenir, cachait sa tête dans ses mains pour dérober ses larmes. A l'instant elle se troubla, et la toile n'était pas encore baissée, que, descendant de ce trône déjà funeste, elle se précipita dans la chambre voisine.<sup>133</sup>

Corinne fails as a woman in the moment of her utmost triumph as an artist, since the opera scene is cut short by Oswald's departure to England and the de facto separation of the two lovers. Few scholars have paid attention to the implications of Corinne's musicality and vocal performance in this pivotal scene of the novel, but the precariousness of Corinne's public opera performance, in the socio-cultural and aesthetic context that I have made explicit in chapters 2 and 3, cannot be ignored.<sup>134</sup> In the opera scene, Madame de Staël plays with such stereotypes relating to genius and female performance, pushing her protagonist to the limits of acceptance and cutting her triumph outside social norms short with the failure in the one domain that she

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<sup>132</sup> *OL* III, p.407

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.408.

<sup>134</sup> Boon rightfully points out the problem of Corinne's performance in the context of the time (pp.48-49).

henceforth aspires to; reconciling genius with her desire to marry Oswald. The problem of the female opera singer and her status as social pariah, which impedes on her wish for love and marriage will become a main issue in later texts. Thus, Madame de Staël dramatizes an archetypal paradigm of the singer, whose art in all its genius and integrative force cannot but be disruptive for the woman behind the artist, who inevitably has to answer to certain social constraints when love is involved. Technically speaking a dilettante (since she does not need to earn money from art), Corinne nevertheless represents the impossible musical sublime just as much as she is, in this specific situation, a professional performer on stage struggling to reconcile love and art. In this complexity of the female artist, Madame de Staël very distinctively bridges the gap between the earlier visions of idealized female song and later literary treatments of the professional singer who, in addition to the question of aesthetics and genius, will have to answer to society.

Elaborating on the paradigm of music's ambiguity, Madame de Staël uses it to show her heroine's gradual personal and vocal decline, which eventually results in the death of artist and woman. However utopian, music retains its status as an ambiguous art in the novel, capable of soothing Oswald's melancholia, yet also capable of reinforcing negative moods and generally acting less as catharsis than as a catalysis for Corinne's otherworldliness, as the episode of Holy Week shows, where Oswald seeks out Corinne in the Sistine chapel, only to find the artist entirely transfixed by the musical-religious ceremony: 'Oswald lui-même disparut à ses yeux. Il lui semblait que c'était dans un tel moment d'exaltation qu'on aimerait mourir, [...] si tout à coup un ange venait enlever sur ses ailes le sentiment et la pensée, étincelles divines qui retourneraient vers leur source: la mort ne serait pour ainsi dire qu'un acte spontané du cœur, qu'une prière plus ardente et mieux exaucée'.<sup>135</sup> Likewise, the Scottish romances that Corinne performs for Oswald do nothing to improve either protagonist's melancholia. Rather, in a similar way to Werther's and Lotte's Ossian consumption, music here serves to catalyze the characters' melancholia and confirm music's contribution to Corinne's decline and

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<sup>135</sup> *OL* III, p.255.



eventual death.<sup>136</sup> If music can be regarded as a constant score to the novel, it increasingly exerts its potential for ambiguity and reinforces the female artist's downfall. The paternal taboo that weighs on her relationship with Oswald is equally marked by a verdict on her musical performance, since she reminds Oswald's father of 'une de ces belles Grecques qui enchantaient et subjuguèrent le monde' – a remark which leaves painfully open the question of whether or not Oswald's father refers to the Greek lyrical poets or the professional high-class prostitutes (the *hetaera*) and which refers back to the problematic double-bind of female musicality.

Starting with Corinne's first improvisation, the utopia of her voice gradually fades as does the enticing nature of music which was used to underpin the experience of Oswald and Corinne in a utopian Italy. In her first improvisation already, she adapts her words to the presence of the melancholic Oswald, thus passing from a universal artistic claim to a more personal performance, and thus compromising her artistic genius early on in the novel.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, the first improvisation still represents a type of ideal vocal performance, evocative of original, lyrical genius and an unspeakable union of music and words. It is here where the union between ideal and performance, between music and femininity is most strongly developed, where the ideal of 'musical feminine' blends with the female musician and purveys an image of female artistic empowerment. Corinne displays various forms of this musical hybridity, through her dance performance and her acting, which not only see her compromise her artistic genius more (in an effort to please Oswald), but which also increase the rupture between body and voice, music and words. Her most genuine form of expression, her improvisation, is her own, spontaneous creation, reuniting the power of music and voice with her genius and imagination. None of her other performances is able to reproduce the originality and sublimity of the original woman performer, but are much more just performances of works already written – even though Corinne makes these works her own through her performance. Thus, if she continues to display various forms of artistic genius up until her final, written swansong, she loses the integrative quality of her vocality and the

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<sup>136</sup> See *FA* VIII, pp.230-46; *OL* III, pp.226-27.

<sup>137</sup> See *OL* III, p.40.

ability to blend genius, voice and performance. Unsurprisingly, her most accomplished performance as a singer occurs within opera and coincides with her utter failure as a woman – the turning point in the novel. The Venice episode concludes tellingly with Corinne, who used to appear as music incarnate, as no longer able to bear the profound effects that music has on her: ‘la musique ne lui causait qu’un tressaillement douloureux’.<sup>138</sup>

### **‘Où donc est votre belle Italie?’ The Possibility of Artistic Reconciliation**

In conclusion, it may look as if even a genius like Corinne did not escape the ambiguity and danger associated with female musicality and that, following her operatic triumph and the loss of her lover, she commences a slow degradation into silence and death. Oswald eventually marries the female character without a proper voice, Corinne’s taciturn half-sister Lucile who, diametrically opposed to her artistic sister, practises only domestic activities, among which music has been firmly banned.<sup>139</sup>

Corinne’s universal genius deteriorates in the light of her auto-fixation on her suffering, as the music of her voice turns into cacophony: ‘c’était le cri de la douleur, cri monotone à la longue, comme celui des oiseaux de la nuit; il y avait trop d’ardeur dans les expressions, trop d’impétuosité, trop peu de nuances: c’était le malheur, mais ce n’était plus le talent’.<sup>140</sup> Whereas music used to be the integrative force of Corinne, able to embrace all art forms and create a realistic scenario for the female artist, it eventually unleashes its ambiguous potential onto Corinne, fuelling her loss of talent and

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p.436.

<sup>139</sup> Lucile can be regarded as a suitable representative of the Scottish climate in the same way that her sister represents the genius of the South. Nevertheless, Lucile shows some affinity with the arts, since it is through the taboo of music that she best remembers and mourns Corinne who taught her some music despite her step-mother’s prohibition: ‘Ma belle-mère ne voulut pas qu’elle sût la musique’. (*OL* III, p.354).

As Simone Balayé remarks, the reception of the diametrically opposed sisters Corinne and Lucile was typical of the time, as most readers felt strong admiration, and a kind of Romantic love for the artist Corinne, while at the same time accepting Lucile’s and Oswald’s marriage of convenience as the norm and the only possible constellation with regard to socio-cultural norms (‘Corinne et les amis’, p.145).

<sup>140</sup> *OL* III, p.473.



subsequent depression as well as hastening the disintegration of an artist who, similarly to Mignon's prefigurement of her transcendence, becomes increasingly detached from her physical form. The woman poet attempts to fixate her thoughts in writing, in the 'Fragments des pensées de Corinne', which however makes the loss of her original gift and her own transition from oral to written discourse, and from acclaimed woman poet to 'fragmented' writer even more blatant:

Quelquefois, quand j'entends la musique, elle me retrace les talents que j'avais; le chant, la danse et la poésie; il me prend alors envie de me dégager du malheur, de reprendre à la joie: mais tout à coup un sentiment intérieur me fait frissonner; on dirait que je suis une ombre qui veut encore rester sur la terre, quand les rayons du jour, quand l'approche des vivants, la forcent à disparaître.<sup>141</sup>

As Mignon's swansong was the most compromised in terms of the narrative frame and alienation between song and singer, so Corinne's last improvisation, entitled *Dernier chant de Corinne*, is her most disembodied and alienated performance; she no longer improvises herself but silently sits hidden behind a dark veil, while a young actress, dressed in white, performs her lines, for the first time written down, a mere echo of the actual performance that could not be preserved: 'Rappelez-vous quelquefois mes vers, mon âme y est empreinte'.<sup>142</sup> Corinne regrets her talent and her identity. Prefiguring her departure from the world in which her heart is no longer at home, she also acknowledges her own part in consciously abandoning the exclusivity of her genius for the suffering she experienced as a woman: 'J'aurais rempli ma destinée, j'aurais été digne des bienfaits du ciel, si j'avais consacré ma lyre retentissante à célébrer la bonté divine manifestée par l'univers'.<sup>143</sup>

At the same time, this transposed performance of the woman poet's *chant de cygne* refers to an important aspect that Madame de Staël develops alongside her heroine's increasing silence. In the face of her own death, Corinne turns towards other female characters, passing on her genius and her gifts, thus creating a visible female artistic

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p.475.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.524.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.523. There is an interesting correlation between Staël's compromised genius Corinne and later July Monarchy treatments of the topic, such as George Sand's novella *La Prima Donna* (see chapter 7).

legacy and filiation. The most striking example becomes her niece Juliette, the daughter of Oswald and Lucile who, a far cry from her mother's blond, pale allure looks like a young replica of her famous aunt, constantly reminding her father of his failure and regret:

Cette petite ressemblait à Corinne: l'imagination de Lucile avait été fort occupée du souvenir de sa sœur pendant sa grossesse; et Juliette, c'était ainsi qu'elle se nommait, avait les cheveux et les yeux de Corinne. Lord Nelvil le remarqua et en fut trouble; il la prit dans ses bras, et la serra contre son cœur avec tendresse. Lucile ne vit dans ce mouvement qu'un souvenir de Corinne, et dès cet instant elle ne jouit pas, sans mélange, de l'affection que lord Nelvil témoignait à Juliette'.<sup>144</sup>

Juliette is a most interesting character, as she can be read in a rather positive way – as a good genius, almost like Mignon, she represents her father's and mother's externalized feelings and preoccupation with Corinne. Not surprisingly, her name echoes Shakespeare's play, which Corinne performed for Oswald and which stood as a symbol of the woman artist's failure to reconcile art and love. To a certain extent, Juliette realizes this reconciliation, leading her parents towards Italy and towards a reunion with Corinne. The little girl represents a new, potential Corinne, who, upon her arrival, is promptly introduced to her famous aunt who teaches her everything she knows in the short period before her death:

Oswald voulut au moins que Corinne vît sa fille, et il ordonna secrètement à sa bonne de la conduire chez elle. Il alla au-devant de l'enfant comme elle revenait, et lui demanda si elle avait été contente de sa visite. Juliette lui répondit par une phrase italienne, et sa prononciation, qui ressemblait à celle de Corinne, fit tressaillir Oswald. – Qui vous a appris cela, ma fille? dit-il. – La dame que je viens de voir, répondit-elle.[...] Et vous plait-elle, cette dame, ma fille? continua lord Nelvil. – Beaucoup, répondit Juliette; j'y veux aller tous les jours. Elle m'a promis de m'apprendre tout ce qu'elle sait. Elle dit qu'elle veut que je ressemble à Corinne.<sup>145</sup>

Most importantly, Corinne instructs her niece in music, teaching her songs that she herself used to perform in front of Oswald, and that Juliette is to play to her father every

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.491-92.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.517-18.



year, in remembrance of Corinne. Likewise, Corinne is reconciled with her sister Lucile on whom she bestows part of her own personality: 'Il faut que vous soyez vous et moi tout à la fois'.<sup>146</sup> The question of whether or not these transpositions of Corinne on her sister and niece are valid, or even valuable actions, exceed the scope of the novel, and are difficult to answer. Madame de Staël's objective, however, is quite clear, as she consciously crafts a tradition of female artistry, by enabling Corinne to pass on her genius onto the next generation of women. Though her own voice is silenced, she nevertheless passes it on, with the hope that especially Juliette might be able to perform this type of female genius to the fullest and that the potential of the female artist may be fulfilled in subsequent generations. With this female filiation, Madame de Staël addresses a very important topic concerning the woman singer and by doing so, prefigures an essential motif of later texts. As I have explained in the previous chapter, the singer's status as a biological female is problematic due to the ensuing conflict between feminine ideals and female musicality, and her challenging the norms of marriage and motherhood, which potentially puts her in a position of social isolation and otherness. Corinne's bond with Juliette may then be described as a symbolic form of motherhood, through which the artist is able to pass on her craft, while at the same time contributing to a continuous history of female musicality and aesthetics and creating an alternative to the dogma of female biology. More importantly, Juliette constitutes a case-in-point for female artistic education, another point in which Madame de Staël proves to be innovative, as she also takes the image of the singer further away from the ideal of musical feminine towards a vision of female genius through training and support by a sisterhood of artists. Corinne's genius, her voice and musicality remain a mystery throughout the novel, whereas Juliette's artistry, although the reader does not ultimately know how it will develop, can always be traced back to Corinne's genius and teaching. This bond between like minded artists and the blend of female genius with education and professionalism will become a strong motif in later texts. But it is Madame de Staël who first articulates this female potential as a shift of paradigms that,

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p.520.

while not entirely discarding the ideal of the musical feminine, critically addresses the questions of female artistic empowerment.

As we have seen, Madame de Staël presents us a very complex vision of female musicality as a potential utopia that does not yet exist, and which negotiates and struggles with very disparate views on woman, music and genius. In the wake of Mignon and late 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideals of female song, Corinne accomplishes two important steps; not only is she a much more realistic performer than Goethe's character, who transforms song ideals into a socio-cultural utopia, as the novel's title suggest; but moreover, she is a performer who, while perfectly embodying the original essence of woman-music, at the same time owns the discourse on music and presents herself as a performer in charge, until she is faced with the dilemma of her love. This fact is emphasized by Madame de Staël's very broad use of song ideals, and a quite controversial hybridity that she ascribes to her heroine; musically, poetically, socially and culturally. Critics of the time may certainly have felt overwhelmed by this challenging new aesthetic and gender performance and perhaps could only misunderstand, and eventually dismiss Staël's novel. What is most important in the case of Corinne, is that her author did not merely create her as an ideal, poetic variant of the 'woman poet', but as a complex, multi-faceted performer, who embraces and owns all vocal art forms as a woman, and the respective performance spaces that derive from them, from the most idealized stance of the woman poet to the utterly scandalous pose of the opera performer. There are few texts, either male- or female-authored, that go as far in their dramatization of the female voice and of the taboo that weighed on woman, voice and performance. At the same time, Madame de Staël, like Goethe, does not serve stereotypes or conventional ideals of woman-music, and this is what makes both Mignon and Corinne such unique, strong cases of female song. What both figures manage to accomplish in terms of female agency, is that they actively challenge the static pose of the woman with the lyre, who is looked at rather than heard, and who is a lyrical object rather than a narrative subject in charge of her performance. As potentially strong *artist* figures, both characters thus defy, to different extents, the cliché of the

female songbird, as well as certain stereotypes associated with female song and musical aesthetics.

Goethe and Madame de Staël inaugurate a crucial debate on female voice and song as a carrier of a proper female genius and artistic liberation, which authors of subsequent generations in France and Germany took back up, developing the figure's potential, yet also engaging with the problematic issues of the singer as they relate to the ongoing discourse on music, poetry and femininity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of all Romantic artists, the singer may well be the one most susceptible to the paradoxical discussion revolving around female musicality– and eventually a proper female expression of the Romantic artist per se. The continuity of the motif accounts for this ongoing fascination, as will be shown by our discussion of singer and song in the following case studies.



## Chapter 5

### Beyond the Canon:

#### Singing Strategies in the Works of Caroline Auguste Fischer (1808-1818)

In my discussion of Mignon and Corinne as two powerful literary cases in point for the motif of singer and song, I showed to what extent both characters, although partly compliant with contemporary aesthetics of female musicality, defy literary and cultural commonplaces of female song, and how they negotiate the dichotomy of the musical feminine and the female performing body. Both Mignon and Corinne exhibit a striking potential for female artistic empowerment, catalysed through their voices and through the art form of music and song.

As archetypes of female song, both characters were highly inspirational for later authors, some of whom I have briefly mentioned as part of Mignon's legacy. However, the literary treatment of the female singer in the period between 1800 and 1820 varies greatly with regard to the disputed issues of female artistic genius, legitimacy and professionalism, juxtaposed with the highly symbolic, stylized and idealized imagery attached to music and femininity. German Romantic imagery ranges from the highly poetic, as found in Novalis' treatment of song (embodied in such characters as Zulima, Fabel and Mathilde in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*), to Sophie Mereau's strong argument for women performers and finally Hoffmann's vision of musical literature, which I will discuss in chapter 6.

One author who occupies a threshold position in the highly diverse and heteroclit landscape of German Romanticism and who has in recent years been rediscovered as a possible key figure in writing the Romantic woman artist, is Caroline Auguste Fischer. In the context of this thesis, Fischer occupies the problematic position (as do some of the authors discussed in chapter 7) of a non-canonical writer whose works were read during her lifetime but who essentially remained excluded from the major literary discourse of the time and who has since been forgotten. Fischer's name may thus seem less important than that of Goethe,

Staël or Balzac, and a discussion of female song in male-authored works of German Romanticism (those for example of Novalis, Brentano or Eichendorff) might appear the more obvious choice in this chapter. Nevertheless, Fischer's case is particularly interesting and relevant because of her position on the margins of German literature, a position which adds to the author's unusual, striking treatment of ideals pertaining to femininity and to stereotypes of female song and the musical feminine. As I will argue, Fischer's unique position as an outsider within German literature in fact makes her discussion of the singer as a carrier of female and musical otherness, transgression and marginalization extremely pertinent, and much more relevant to my discussion of the motif, than that of more canonical authors. In what follows, I shall discuss to what extent her treatment of female song, which she formulated from a marginalized perspective, undermines predominant ideals regarding music and femininity and constitutes a critique of traditional concepts of the musical feminine, by looking at three of her key texts: *Der Günstling*, *Margarethe* and *Justine*.

### Piecing Together a 'Woman of Letters'

Caroline Auguste Fischer shares with many other women authors around 1800 the problem of accessing the male-dominated literary discourse of the time, of being able to publish and be acknowledged by their peers and, finally, of belonging to the literary canon, which few women managed to accomplish. The discrepancy between women Romantics' status as wives, mothers and collaborators and their actual contribution to the literary discourse of their time and, thus, their place in literary history, persists to this day, and, in the eyes of some scholars, prevents an adequate assessment of the Romantic epoch.<sup>1</sup> As I argued in chapter 1, it can be misleading to discuss literary texts along the strict lines of 'male' and 'female' writing traditions, and scholarship should assess each literary text in its own right and context, while re-assessing the traditional canon and the aesthetics through which this canon is

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<sup>1</sup> See Renate von Heydebrand, *Kanon, Macht, Kultur: theoretische, historische und soziale Aspekte ästhetischer Kanonbildung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998).

constructed by balancing male- and female-authored texts. In fact, the use of traditional writing paradigms for her own purposes might have been part of a woman writer's strategy to subvert and deconstruct these paradigms in her writing, as we shall see in the case of the author in this chapter.

Caroline Auguste Fischer has been largely ignored by literary scholarship. Although her name as well as her works have started to sound familiar to some specialist scholars of German Romanticism, she remains on the margins, if not outside the current literary canon. While the women authors I have briefly mentioned so far are familiar even to non-specialists, the name of Caroline Auguste Fischer is literally forgotten today. The main reason for this seems to have been that, despite her considerable success as an author, Fischer was neither a *literary persona* in her own right through her parentage or her marriage to a well-known poet, nor did she hold a salon or mingle with any of the literary groups that shaped the culture of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Germany. Thus, even though her literary works received very favourable reviews during her lifetime, lack of support and vital connections in the literary world exacerbated her battle against literary insignificance and oblivion.

As a non-canonical author, Fischer poses the double challenge of a literary case study for the motif of the singer and her song, and of an author whose writings and aesthetics, in the eyes of the few scholars who have worked on her, merit a re-assessment and re-appraisal within 19<sup>th</sup>-century musical-literary discourse.

In contrast to other well-known women of Romanticism, little is known about Fischer's biography and circumstances apart from the fact that she was born into a Braunschweig artist-musician family in 1764, and that her career as a writer was marked by life-long financial and personal struggles. A two-time divorcee who lost custody of her children, Fischer eventually declined into mental illness, and probably died in a Frankfurt asylum in 1842. A close study of her *œuvre*, however, reveals a sharp intellect and somewhat radical views, proof of what must have been a sound education,<sup>2</sup> with a definite knowledge of the aesthetic and intellectual tendencies and debates of her time as well as a distinct awareness of her own artistic agenda, which makes her *œuvre* appear so radically different from other texts of the

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<sup>2</sup> Christine Touaillon, *Der deutsche Frauenroman des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Wien/Leipzig: W. Braumüller, 1919), p.580. Touaillon argued that Fischer probably received a solid musical education within her family.



same epoch.<sup>3</sup> Quite tellingly, her literary debut, *Gustavs Verirrungen* (1801), a critical take on the *Bildungsroman* genre, was published around the same time as her then husband Christian August Fischer's gender polemic, the infamous sequel to Karoline von Wobeser's *Elisa, oder das Weib wie es seyn sollte*.<sup>4</sup> Whereas her husband sided with the predominant gender theorists whose views of womanhood I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, Caroline became known for her argument against pre-conceived characters and roles: 'Man erzählt uns oft was die Menschen *sind*, man beschreibt uns noch öfter – vielleicht ein wenig zu oft – was sie *seyn sollen*; aber man sagt uns, wie mich dünkt, noch immer nicht oft genug: *auf welche Weise sie das werden, was sie sind*'.<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see in the following discussion of selected Fischer texts, the discrepancy between what is proclaimed the 'natural' state of a human being and a person's evolution and motivation (in other words the *how* of human behaviour) is a central motif in Fischer's works, if not a barely disguised critique of the contemporary discourse on gender. As discussed earlier, the proclaimed 'natural' (i.e. untrained and 'unspoiled') state of woman and the unalterable characteristics of femininity, genius and art are problematic assumptions which underpinned clichéd images of female song.<sup>6</sup> Writing during the heyday of gender dichotomy, Fischer aims to discuss the conditions and circumstances of a human being's psychological development and behaviour, which implies her questioning the rapport between concepts of femininity, as voiced through the gender dichotomy and through theories and fiction of her time, and her own treatment of the female voice in fiction. Throughout her works, Fischer develops her critique into a rather direct, at times even aggressive, discourse against patriarchal paradigms of her time and their consequences for women, emphasising her overall purpose through the use of traditional genres and motifs, such as the angelic muse-figure or the *femme fatale*.

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<sup>3</sup> Fischer was undoubtedly well-read with regard to major writers (like Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and Richardson) and literary tendencies, such as the epistolary and the sentimentalist novel (see Anita Runge, *Literarische Praxis von Frauen um 1800. Briefroman, Autobiographie, Märchen* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1997), p.34.

<sup>4</sup> Christian August Fischer, *Über den Umgang der Weiber mit den Männern. Ein nothwendiger Anhang zu der bekannten Schrift: 'Elisa, oder das Weib wie es seyn sollte'* (Leipzig: H. Gräff, 1799).

<sup>5</sup> *Gustavs Verirrungen, Gesammelte Werke*, 6 Bände, ed. Anita Runge (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1987ff.), vol V, preface; my emphasis (hereafter *GW*).

<sup>6</sup> See chapters 2 and 3.

Fischer's texts usually juxtapose two antagonistic types of women (and sometimes men), around whom she develops her narrative treatment of women within a patriarchal system of values and staging certain types of femininity. By doing so, she dissects the paradigms of the proclaimed 'natural' state of woman as opposed to the character's motivation, evolution and possible escape routes into personal freedom and self-expression. As an author who draws on contemporary aesthetics, Fischer stages her female characters either as certain types conforming to ideals of late 18<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics or as counter-figures to these ideals. Not coincidentally, the key works discussed in this chapter were published around the same time as a number of rather idealistic, stereotypical treatments of female song.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Fischer's characters appear quite complex, and even the most angelic, muse-like figure evolves and undergoes some kind of change as the plot unfolds, sometimes breaking with stereotypes or emphasising them to the point of derision. This style makes Fischer unusual among women writers of the 1800s.<sup>8</sup>

The issue of strong female characters, and in consequence of strong female artists, in relationship to Fischer's questioning of contemporary ideals of woman and music, is a dramatic focal point in Fischer's writing – in fact, it is directly tied to her questioning of the circumstances and reasons for a person's ideals, characteristics and behaviour, as well as to her questioning of female roles, positions and life choices. In her most developed artist novel, *Margarethe*, Fischer sums up this standpoint in a single sentence, advocating total personal and artistic freedom for the female subject: 'Was du darfst, kann niemand besser wissen, als du selbst'.

In consequence, although little is known about Fischer's later years and literary production, her contribution to the literary discourse did not go unnoticed as, in addition to positive reviews, she was included in Carl Schindel's dictionary of German women writers, the earliest account of writers of Fischer's generation, and the only one to be written during her lifetime.<sup>9</sup>

Schindel in fact dedicated more pages to Fischer than to Friedrich Schlegel's wife Dorothea, and put her in a category comparable to Caroline de la Motte Fouqué

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<sup>7</sup> These include *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as well as Eichendorff's muse figures in *Die Zauberei im Herbste* (1808) and *Das Marmorbild* (1818).

<sup>8</sup> See Touaillon, pp.593/603.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Wilhelm Otto August von Schindel, *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1823-1825).

and Johanna Schopenhauer, both of whom had at the time produced an impressive oeuvre in addition to their status as literary celebrities and salon hostesses. Against this background, Schindel's attention to Fischer deserves mention: crediting her as 'eine wegen ihrer Schicksale sehr interessante Frau und verdienstvolle Schiftstellerin',<sup>10</sup> he discussed her difficult personal and financial situation as well as her struggles to establish herself as a writer – Fischer wrote for a living and must have published under extreme difficulties and Schindel applauded the author who used 'ihre ausgezeichneten Talente zur Abfassung verschiedener Schriften und Beiträge in Zeitschriften, ohne sich zu nennen'.<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing Schindel was able to report that Fischer was conceptualising a substantial work on women's condition: 'Seit 18 Jahren sammelt sie nicht fremde, sondern eigene Gedanken zu einem Werke über die Weiber; wenn und ob es erscheinen wird, vermag sie bei ihren Verhältnissen nicht zu bestimmen'.<sup>12</sup> This work by Fischer never saw the light of day and by the time Schindel wrote his appraisal the author had ceased publishing altogether. After a series of stories and novellas between 1817 and 1820, nothing else is known of the author except that she certainly lived in financial and probably personal distress to the point that she was no longer able to pursue any literary projects.<sup>13</sup> The latter circumstances of Fischer's life ironically sum up the author's life-long struggle and her non-conformism as a woman and a writer.

### Rediscovering a Phenomenon: Fischer's Recent Critical Appraisal

After the entry in Schindel's manual of German women authors, the name of Caroline Auguste Fischer fell into oblivion, whether because she was never associated with a prominent name who could have secured her a place in literary manuals or because of her position outside the relevant literary and intellectual circles and schools of thought.<sup>14</sup> To this day, standard works on German literature

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

<sup>13</sup> See *ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>14</sup> Two works mention Fischer briefly: Goedeke, *Grundriss der deutschen Dichtung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition by Edmund Goetze, VI (Leipzig: Ehlermann, 1898); Pathaky, *Lexicon deutscher Frauen der*



of the 1800s mention her, if at all, in a few lines,<sup>15</sup> and it was not until the rediscovery by Christine Touaillon that Fischer received credit as ‘eine Schriftstellerin [...] welche durch ihre Eigenart, durch die Kraft ihrer Empfindung und Darstellung alle anderen deutschen Frauen des 18. Jahrhunderts weit übertrifft’.<sup>16</sup> Touaillon’s groundbreaking study remained the only one of its kind for the major part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the republication of Fischer’s œuvre in the late 1980s,<sup>17</sup> a considerable number of scholarly studies have helped to re-assess her within the context of German Romanticism, the gender polemic of the 1800s and issues of women’s writing.<sup>18</sup> More specific studies treat the author’s short stories,<sup>19</sup> as well as male representation in Fischer’s novels.<sup>20</sup> A number of scholars have either contributed articles on select aspects of Fischer’s writing or included her in studies within the wider scope of women’s writing around 1800,<sup>21</sup> exploring the difficulties of women

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*Feder. Eine Zusammenstellung der seit dem Jahre 1840 erschienenen Werke weiblicher Autoren, nebst Biographien der lebenden und einem Verzeichnis der Pseudonyme* (Berlin: Pathaky, 1898).

<sup>15</sup> The *Oxford Companion to German Literature* does not mention her, and the *Feminist Encyclopaedia of German Literature* only briefly alludes to one of her stories. A recent book to include Fischer is *A History of Women’s Writing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, ed. Jo Catling (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), another is the *Cambridge History of German Literature*, which confirms Fischer’s position outside gender stereotypes.

<sup>16</sup> Touaillon, p.578.

<sup>17</sup> The *Gesammelte Werke* contain the texts by Fischer that are available. Schindel and Touaillon discuss other works that could not be located. A novel announced by Fischer, *Clementina*, was apparently never seen through.

<sup>18</sup> The leading Fischer scholar Anita Runge has provided several standard works: *Literarische Praxis von Frauen um 1800. Briefroman, Autobiographie, Märchen* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1997); ‘Wenn Schillers Geist weibliche Körper belebt: Emanzipation und künstlerisches Selbstverständnis in den Romanen und Erzählungen Caroline Auguste Fischers’, in *Untersuchungen zum Roman von Frauen um 1800*, ed. Helga Gallas/Magdalene Heuser (Tübingen: Niemeyer; 1990), pp.184-202; ‘Die Dramatik weiblicher Selbstverständigung in den Briefromanen Caroline Auguste Fischers’, in *Die Frau im Dialog: Studien zu Theorie und Geschichte des Briefes*, ed. Anita Runge/Lieselotte Steinbrügge (Stuttgart: Metzler; 1991), pp.93-114; Clementine Kügler, *Caroline Auguste Fischer (1764-1842). Eine Werkbiographie* (unpublished doctoral thesis, FU Berlin, 1989); Judith Purver, ‘Caroline Auguste Fischer: An Introduction’, in *Women Writers of the Age of Goethe*, IV, ed. Margaret Ives (Lancaster: Lancaster University, 1991), pp.3-30; Purver, ‘“Zufrieden mit stillerem Ruhme”? Reflections on the Place of Women Writers in the Literary Spectrum of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries’, *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 64-65 (1996), 72-93.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., ‘Die Erzählungen Caroline Auguste Fischers im Kontext ihrer Zeit’, in *Schnittpunkt Romantik: Text- und Quellenstudien zur Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Wolfgang Bunzel/Konrad Feilchenfeldt/Walter Schmitz (Tübingen: Niemeyer; 1997), pp.59-68.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., ‘Passion, Possession, Patriarchy: Images of Men in the Novels and Short Stories of Caroline Auguste Fischer (1764-1842)’, *Neophilologus*, 79.4 (10/1995), 619-28.

<sup>21</sup> Eva Kammler, *Zwischen Professionalisierung und Dilettantismus. Romane und ihre Autorinnen um 1800* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992); Sigrun Schmid, *Der ‘Selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit’ entkommen: Perspektiven bürgerlicher Frauenliteratur ; dargestellt an Romanbeispielen Sophie von La Roches, Therese Hubers, Friederike Helene Ungers, Caroline*

writers in terms of authorship and publication,<sup>22</sup> as well as their contribution to the genre of the artist novel.<sup>23</sup> Fischer's novels *Die Honigmonathe* and *Margarethe* have attracted particular attention from German scholars, whereas her short story *William der Neger* has had greater exposure in the English-speaking world.<sup>24</sup> The few scholars that have worked on Caroline Auguste Fischer unanimously agree that this author has been unjustly forgotten and that she not only deserves a re-appraisal but that she should be a fixed part of the German literary canon.

### Writing Music, Writing Difference?

In contrast to the Romantic stereotype of the prolific woman author, Fischer's œuvre appears modest. Despite positive first reviews,<sup>25</sup> she only managed to publish four novels in her short career, *Gustavs Verirrungen* (1801), *Die Honigmonate* (1802) and *Der Günstling* (1808); and *Margarethe* in 1812, as well as several shorter prose works before 1820.

Unlike contemporaries, such as Schlegel, Mereau and Brentano, Fischer is an author whose œuvre appears closely to reflect her difficult life circumstances. Fischer did not write to supplement her husband's work; she wrote against the very notion of woman that her husband propagated. Nor did she mass-produce nor

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*Auguste Fischers, Johanna Schopenhauers und Sophie Bernhardis* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999); Michaela Krug, *Auf der Suche nach dem eigenen Raum: Topographien des Weiblichen im Roman von Autorinnen um 1800* (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann; 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Carola Hilmes, 'Namenlos. Über die Verfasserin von 'Gustavs Verirrungen'', in *Spurensuche in Sprach- und Geschichtslandschaften. Festschrift für Ernst Erich Metzner*, ed. Andrea Hohmeyer/Jasmin Rühl/Ingo Wintermezer (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), pp.265-76.

<sup>23</sup> Although her remarks are not entirely accurate, Judith Martin proposes a survey of female-authored artist novels, in which she includes Fischer: 'Between Exaltation and Melancholy: Corinne and the Female Artist Novel in Nineteenth-Century Germany', *JAISA*, Spring 2000, 29-50.

<sup>24</sup> 'William the Negro', transl. Susan Zantop, in *Bitter Healing: German Women Writers from 1700 – 1830: An Anthology*, ed. Jeannine Blackwell/Susanne Zantop (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp.354-67; Susan Zantop, 'Karoline Auguste Fernandine Fischer', *German Writers in the Age of Goethe: Sturm und Drang to Classicism*, ed. James Hardin/Christoph Schweitzer (Detroit: Gale; 1990), pp.31-36; Daragh Downes, 'Alterity: Same Difference?', in *Das schwierige neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Barkhoff/Gilbert Carr/Roger Paulin (Tübingen: Niemeyer; 2000), pp.488-96; Roger Little, 'From Taboo to Totem: Black Man, White Woman, in Caroline Auguste Fischer and Sophie Doin', *MLR*, 93 (October 1998), 948-60.

<sup>25</sup> *ALZ*, 3. 198 (09.06.1801), p.75. The reviewer emphasizes the literary quality of *Gustav*, sign of a promising new author (who, at the time, is assumed to be male). Fischer signed most subsequent publications as 'Verfasser(in) von Gustavs Verirrungen', and later on simply as Caroline Auguste.



engage in theoretical debates on music or gender of her time – both of which would have required her to have access to literary circles and to a better support system. To put it bluntly, Fischer's life was difficult and frustrating, and her writing echoes these circumstances, reading like a dramatic script of the author's struggle as a woman and artist who, despite drawing on contemporary styles and aesthetics, did not sugar-coat her literary treatment but questioned contemporary gender models directly and trenchantly – exposing, even accusing, pre-conceived models of femininity and of the rapport between the sexes, including male-authored concepts of art. As such, her use of traditional forms such as the *Bildungsroman*, or clichéd imagery of female artistry underlines the subversive quality of her style. She never published any theoretical texts that specifically commented on the musical-literary discourse or took a position with regard to (male-dominated) concepts of femininity and art, but rather, comparable to a writer like Hoffmann who conceptualized music in his fiction, formulated these issues in her writing and put forward quite new ideas, which were certainly fostered by her bitter life experiences yet which clearly surpassed the biographical dimension through the aesthetics and the quality of her work, making her stand out among women Romantics.

More than other texts of the time, Fischer's œuvre might imply a writing of difference, because not only did she write from an isolated position, which comes through in the sense of isolation and difference surrounding her heroines, but her writing style and the manner in which she presents her ideas significantly differ from those of other authors. Fischer dramatizes contemporary models of both masculinity and femininity, of art and artists in her writings and, in doing so, draws on contemporary aesthetics while negotiating these topics with a sense of freedom and radicalism that dominates her œuvre. Her writing stands out as subversive, showing remarkable wit and irony in exposing traditional gender ideals, a quality matched by few other writers of the era, and which makes the discrepancy between the importance of Fischer's work and her vanishing from the collective memory disturbing.<sup>26</sup> Thus, although arguing for a 'writing of difference' when speaking about a woman author is a slippery road to follow, one cannot ignore Fischer's exceptional status both as a woman author who produced differently, i.e. outside the

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<sup>26</sup> See Runge, 'Wenn Schillers Geist', p 193.



traditional canon, and as the author of a literary discourse which, although based upon and indebted to contemporary aesthetics (and major works of literature from which Fischer possibly drew inspiration),<sup>27</sup> adopted a different view on them. Fischer's potentially polemic treatment of the woman artist, of music and song, is among the most striking of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature and incorporates both aesthetic questioning and the ironically bitter voice of the woman author who rarely depicts moments of contentment, let alone happiness for the woman artist, but who nevertheless raises important questions concerning the ideal of woman and music.

In that regard, Fischer's use of music and song in her texts is just as interesting. Perhaps despite her own upbringing, Fischer did not specifically write music novellas, but used music pragmatically, almost sparsely, tying the art form itself, as well as the poetic ideals it purveyed, closely to her overall purposes in writing: when she writes the woman singer, she does so as part of her questioning of the ideals of music and femininity as opposed to female agency, liberation, self-expression and fulfilment. Although clearly rooted in late 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical aesthetics and referencing specific images of female song in her work, Fischer does not accumulate musical scenes in her texts, nor does she stage mysterious singers, be they geniuses, sirens, or divas, in the middle of her novels. Nor does she create an artistic utopia linked to music, song and the female voice, as do Goethe and Staël. Displaying a refined knowledge of musical imagery, Fischer rather alludes to traditional, poeticized paradigms of song and femininity as we find them in prose texts of the period, all the while playing with these paradigms, twisting them as part of her questioning of the stereotype and ideal of woman-music. As we shall see, her critical treatment of the muse-figure nevertheless coincides with her integration of female song into the quest for female liberation, self-expression and artistic accomplishment. Fischer uses musical imagery subtly, such as in her first major work *Die Honigmonate* (1802), but she uses it pertinently as part of her overall polemic against dichotomist, patriarchal gender models and their ensuing consequences for men and women alike. Fischer dramatizes music not as an ideal but as an illusion and potential trap for women, who find themselves fixed in the passive pose of the muse under a male gaze, devoid of any agency or artistic

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<sup>27</sup> See n.3.

significance. This central polemic underpins Fischer's entire œuvre, especially since the author contrasts such traditional musical-feminine ideals with her heroines' quests for viable female artistic and personal self-expression and agency.

### **Playing the Harp Until Death Do Them Part: *Der Günstling* (1808)**

#### **Synopsis**

*The Tsarina Ivanova has fallen in love with and pursues her minion, the statesman Alexander, who neither can nor wants to requite the sovereign's love, since he considers her to be unwomanly because of her powerful status and demeanour. Avoiding court life, Alexander subsequently falls in love with his foster-daughter, Maria, an angelic incarnation of ideal femininity. Although Maria has a thirst for knowledge and embarks on a musical apprenticeship, she eventually cedes to Alexander's desire for her and the two are finally married. However, the embittered and vengeful Tsarina has the newlyweds' bed poisoned and the novel concludes with Maria's swansong, which she sings during her wedding night, shortly before her and Alexander's death.*

Grim as it may be in its outcome, the novel portrays not only a fascinating power struggle between woman and man, sovereign and subordinate, but also questions traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity through the use of stereotypical imagery. Maria appears as the pawn between Alexander and Ivanova: an epitome of the angelic, innocent child-woman, a young girl with an avid thirst for knowledge and a particular gift for music, she becomes Alexander's muse, the canvas on to which he projects his idea of the perfect woman and wife. However, Maria also implicitly questions the archetype of the muse through her potential for education and her subsequent personal and artistic evolution in the course of the novel. Hers is an apprenticeship gone wrong, a sort of *Bildungsroman ex negativo*, which sees her progress from the state of the harp-girl, Alexander's muse, to that of an educated, knowledgeable singer and artist, only to then regress into the state of the harp-girl as Alexander's wife.

In this novel, Fischer raises the question of female education as a crucial aspect of female agency – in this, she is stunningly progressive, implying a female character's potential through education, especially in music, in a way few other

authors did. Education becomes a focal point for Maria's evolution. At the same time, the author questions ideals of female musicality, such as the harp-girl, subtly, but unmistakably. Although Alexander at first seems to refuse the ideal of the Rousseauesque girl charming him with a peasant tune,<sup>28</sup> he is ultimately unable to differentiate between reality and illusion, since he falls for exactly the same type of ideal woman, whom he sees in his foster-daughter Maria. Maria is made to fit the mould of Alexander's ideal woman and is set up as Ivanova's direct antagonist, which reinforces the artificiality of the feminine ideal through the male gaze, all the while amplifying the role of the Tsarina as an imminent threat to Alexander's happiness with Maria. The narrative perspective plays a crucial role here, as the epistolary novel is entirely told from the male protagonist's point of view. However, it is precisely through this male perspective that Fischer is able to subvert the stereotype and question the male gaze upon woman, a male gaze which interprets and idealizes femininity and makes it fit the male protagonist's wishes and ideals.<sup>29</sup>

It is against these gender schemes and ideals that Maria's failed attempt at an individual, independent life as an artist must be read, and that the girl's ultimate confinement to the static, passive pose of the harp-girl becomes even more ironic, and rather cynical. This being said, the lack of a female point of view makes it difficult to assess the reasons why Maria agrees to marry Alexander and abandon her pursuits as a singer and musician and leaves the question as to why she abandons her art studies unanswered.

To begin with, the 'romance' between Maria and Alexander starts out with the archetypal gaze of the male protagonist who, despite his better judgment, falls for his ideal of womanhood, the perfectly innocent and pure Maria: 'Die schönste, reinste, seelenvollste Jungfrau ist mein. Ihr erstaunt. Ich erstaune, wie ihr'.<sup>30</sup> His obsession with the ideal feminine becomes more pronounced as well as more profane as soon as Maria takes up music lessons. In that aspect, the narration develops the archetypal ambivalence of woman-music, of female musicality as experienced through the male subject: Maria as an ideal merges with the performing

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<sup>28</sup> 'Das Mädchen schien, besonders in seiner idealisch-ländlichen Kleidung, ein überirdisches Wesen, das Bild der reinsten, vollendetsten Weiblichkeit; doch wahrlich meinem Herzen blieb es fremd. Ich fühlte mich – leider möchte ich sagen – gezwungen, den Schein sogleich von der Wirklichkeit zu trennen' (GW IV, p.25).

<sup>29</sup> See also Anita Runge's afterword in *Der Günstling*, p.199.



body of the woman musician, setting the tone for both a highly sensual and pleasurable experience on the part of Alexander watching and listening, and the latent threat of the underlying eroticism of the woman singer:

Sie wollte fast alle für sie schicklichen Instrumente lernen, spielt jetzt wirklich das Clavier, die Harfe, die Laute mit seltner Fertigkeit und mit unbeschreiblichem Ausdruck. Ihre seelenvolle, himmelreine Stimme übertrifft das Alles. Seh' ich sie am Clavier, [...] ja dann wend' ich mich ab; denn meiner Ruhe droht Gefahr.<sup>31</sup>

This is a highly interesting moment in the story, as it focuses closely on Alexander's ambivalent attitude towards Maria, towards the feminine ideal and reality through the musical experience, connecting the poetic sublimity of song with the eroticism of its performance.<sup>32</sup> While he listens in rapture to the girl's soulful and heavenly pure voice, which constitutes a truly poetic experience, Alexander cannot help but watch the performing girl, that is the female body for all its sensuality, which causes his unease. The seemingly poetic allure of the scene barely disguises the erotic tension underlying the male gaze. The relationship between Alexander and Maria evolves around the man's paradigmatic ambivalence towards female musicality: in a narrative and aesthetic interplay, the author juxtaposes Maria's passion for music and knowledge in general and her ensuing educational endeavours with Alexander's growing passion in a worldly sense, which evolves from a platonic adoration towards a more bodily, human need and increased feelings of male possessiveness. In this aspect, Fischer both draws on the cliché of ambivalent, poetic-erotic female musicality and takes it further: if the music education has the potential of developing Maria's personality and identity, it also reinforces her appeal as a muse to Alexander – in a sense, Alexander's angelic muse, the unattainable ideal, receives a sensual body through her musical and vocal training. Thus, she becomes even more attractive as an object of both poetic and carnal desire for Alexander, whose claim on Maria is presented in the seemingly generous, altruistic pose of the father who only wants the best for his daughter and who cannot refuse any of her wishes – this however rather adds to the overall creepiness of his attitude. Alexander loves the *image* of the musical Maria, the

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<sup>30</sup> *GW* IV, p.32.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 3 for my discussion of the ambivalence of female musicality.

object she constitutes for him when she makes music and especially when she sings, the effect that her voice has on him and the pleasure of watching her perform. In accordance with the aesthetics of female song outlined earlier, music makes Maria more beautiful and desirable as a woman, poetically and sexually, as it links her song performance to male rapture – moreover, in this case, the idealization through music has disturbing fetishist undertones which reinforce the ambivalence of Maria's sublimity through music. Alexander complies with all Maria's artistic requests, but in reality does so only in order to dwell on his own idealization of her and to further his claims to make her his wife: 'Wer darf mir wehren, für die Bildung dieses herrlichen Mädchens alles zu thun? Ihr Wohl als das Meinige zu betrachten? So lange sie selbst mir bleiben will, wer darf sie mir rauben?'<sup>33</sup>

Alexander's growing obsession with his foster-daughter inevitably implies a constraint on her artistic persona, namely the requirement of domestic music-making and its ensuing conflict for the singer as a public performer. While she never actually treads a theatrical stage nor earns her money as a singer, Maria is defined as a potentially professional musician, with music constituting the realm in which she displays an extraordinary talent and exists as an individual, an independent and accomplished person. She is not a ready-made musical genius, but actually builds on a pre-existing talent in order to reach full artistic expertise. While she shows stunning talent, her foster father actually does not understand this potential, nor does he truly encourage her in her pursuits but considers her thirst for learning rather strange and an obstacle to the 'true love' that she should learn with him.<sup>34</sup> In reality, Alexander's seemingly proactive and progressive attitude vis-à-vis his daughter's education and musical apprenticeship translates as a quintessential patriarchal paradigm of the cultural discourse discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Song and music constitute enhancements of Maria's beauty and charm for the sole purpose of Alexander's pleasure, whereas both the artistic and the individual nature and development of the performer as well as the poetic quality of song become redundant. This fundamental conflict between the male-authored ideal of song and Maria's potential as an artist underpin her apprenticeship as she genuinely strives to

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<sup>33</sup> *GW* IV, p.35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

achieve the highest level of artistic expertise; the omission of Maria's viewpoint and the irony pervading the narration's staging of Alexander's artistic ignorance reinforces the discrepancy between ideal and reality and makes the girl's artistic dilemma even more dramatic, as her endeavours are focalised through Alexander's point of view: Alexander rather casually refers to the girl's obsession with old art masters, and with the lives of other artists which is in fact a pertinent and important issue especially for woman artists.<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen in the case of *Corinne*, the question of an artistic tradition into which the performer may inscribe her own accomplishments, while in turn creating artistic legacy and posteriority, are crucial issues for Maria and attest to her heightened artistic consciousness: what does artistic genius entail, and what is the legacy of earlier great artists? Does genius entail looking back to the old masters or does it rather imply creative originality – and if so, would it be at all possible? What is Maria's own contribution to the artistic discourse and where does her genius lie? These constitute important thoughts for the budding artist Maria and are quite striking given the socio-cultural and aesthetic discourse of the time which, in theory, precludes woman from the genius question, as I have explained earlier.<sup>36</sup> To what extent Maria's intentions are professional or not remains distorted through Alexander's viewpoint, the latter depicting Maria's apprenticeship as rather disturbing and interfering with his own motivations – in fact, art stands between him and Maria, who seems to spend her time with him solely for the purpose of her craft: 'Ein schönes Lied, ein anziehendes Gemälde, eine große in der Geschichte aufgefundene Handlung, die sie mit leuchtendem Auge, mit glühender Wange erzählt: das ist es, weswegen sie meine Ankunft mit Sehnsucht erwartet'.<sup>37</sup>

However, as an artist, Maria fails just as much as Alexander to differentiate between ideal and reality, when she pushes her music studies further and moves from domestic music-making to opera. Occupying the central part of the novel, this personal and artistic apprenticeship marks the turning point in Maria's regression from accomplished artist to the passive stance of Alexander's muse at the end of the novel. What makes this scene even more interesting is the way in which it plays with

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>37</sup> *GW IV*, p.54.



the subject of illusion, which underpins the entire novel and its problematic gender ideals. Similarly to Alexander and his ideal feminine, Maria falls for the illusion of music and her own song ideals. She becomes obsessed with her teacher, the actor and performer Thibaldy, studying all available opera scores and his arias in particular, revelling in the art form and developing an infatuation with the tenor through the music they perform together. While she dwells on the abstract, Romantic, concept of love and sublime music, Thibaldy develops mere human feelings for the girl. Although Maria eventually realizes that her understanding of song is not shared by Thibaldy (who, like Alexander, tries to appropriate her for himself exclusively), her misunderstanding of the musical ideal triggers her regression to the position of Alexander's muse. Maria's love for music and for a specific form of high music remains to a certain extent in the realm of musical ideals, since she is not able to differentiate the professional performance from the ideal of music. While performing her songs with Thibaldy she remains naïve and innocent, loving the idea(l) of her songs and taking Thibaldy's acting for real heroism. The narration plays with images of illusion and ideals, namely the unviable ideals of love and art, which are both dismantled as abstract concepts that have nothing to do with real-life passion and performance. While music for Maria constitutes a spiritual ideal, for Thibaldy it is merely a profession in which, as a performer, he adopts various roles. His love is directed at Maria as the woman performer in the flesh, whereas Alexander continues to clothe his inappropriate love and desire for Maria in romantic imagery of the ideal feminine.

Maria is lost amid stereotypical extremes of female musicality that do not offer her the ultimate truth as they are irreconcilable with her own idealism in art and love. Her options for the perfect model for her own life, life in the convent or life as an artist, her quest for artistic genius and the illusion of the musical performance, have all proven illusory and unsatisfying. As a singer, she remains attached to the stereotypical ideals of sublime song and femininity, unable to bridge the gap between music as an ideal and music as a realistic, professional choice which, inevitably, would break with the ideal of female song and expose the idealized singer to the 'mundane' realm of the performing artist, and to physical love – at least the narration suggests this as Maria's view. Going beyond the stereotypical imagery

of woman and art seen from a male perspective, the author dramatizes Maria's dilemma as that of not finding her own identity either as a woman or as an artist – an identity and a life that could be real and lasting, beyond ideals.<sup>38</sup> By failing to do so, either out of disillusionment or discouragement, or plain confusion, she falls back into patriarchal discourse in that she turns to her foster-father as the focus of her life. Incapable of deciding who she wants to be as a person, as a woman, Maria designates Alexander the only constant in her life, deriving her existence from him, and, literally, conforming herself to the pose of muse and wife. This patriarchal gender model is further poeticized and presented in Romantic imagery through Maria's dream, in which she is united with Alexander in heaven, surrounded by heavenly music – Maria slips back into traditional Romantic femininity.<sup>39</sup>

Ironically, it is the unwomanly Tsarina who cunningly puts an end to Alexander's and Maria's love dilemma by poisoning Alexander with a love potion. When the potion fails to work, Alexander is nursed back to health by Maria. Through her caring and focus on Alexander, Maria gradually retreats into a passive, muse-like stance and into the stereotype of the caring woman.<sup>40</sup> The place formerly occupied by her education and music, her thirst for knowledge, is now taken up by her devotion and care for Alexander. While the latter is ill and unconscious, Maria keeps singing a single, simple tune that she composed in order to speed his recovery.

Besonders schien Mariens Spiel und Gesang wunderbar auf mich zu wirken; doch konnte sie mir nur immer durch ein und dasselbe Lied ein Lächeln abzwängen. Bey allen Anderen verrieth ich, obwohl beruhigt, minder oder mehr schmerzhaft Empfindungen. Sie hatte es kurz vor unserer entscheidenden Unterredung gedichtet, und ich setze es Euch seiner Einfalt und Herzlichkeit wegen her. [...] Sie sang dieses Lied zu ihrer Laute, nach einer alten, herzerschütternden Melodie. Oft – sagt Wilhelm – haben Thränen ihre Stimme erstickt. Dann habe – sonderbar genug – ich mich unwillig von ihr abgewandt und die Augen geschlossen. Endlich aber vermochte sie es, das Lied ohne Thränen zu singen, und bewirkte dadurch, selbst nach dem Zeugnisse des Arztes, meine Genesung augenscheinlich.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.124-25.

<sup>40</sup> See Runge, *Literarische Praxis*, pp.55-56; Barbara Duden, 'Das schöne Eigentum: Zur Herausbildung des bürgerlichen Frauenbildes an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert', *Kursbuch* 47 (1977), 125-40 (pp.137-40).

<sup>41</sup> *GW IV*, pp.150-51.

Sacrificing herself to Alexander's obsession with her and his absolute will to possess her as his wife, Maria loses her poetic quality and musical integrity. The musical gesture as expressed through the basic lied becomes repetitive and monotonous, simple and non-threatening, turning Maria away from both the high art and the performative illusion that is opera and into the stereotype of the singing harp-girl – only to personify Alexander's illusion about gender roles and the re-establishment of the 'natural order'. Maria's music is no longer self-sufficient but attuned to Alexander. She sings what pleases and cures him, not what pleases her, thus exposing the illusion that is the Romantic muse as the male subject's mouthpiece. As a singer, Maria loses her artistic agency and turns into a cliché of Romantic female musicality: it is Alexander who decides which song she should sing, so that she becomes literally fixed in the pose of performing the same piece repetitively. The lied which Maria sings to hasten Alexander's recovery remains her only music until her death and constitutes the last act before she dies. In the end, at the moment of death, Maria finds herself reduced to a Mignon-pastiche, harping and singing the same, simplistic tune for her husband. The lied's simple allure and rhyme pattern emphasise Maria's final fixation on her husband and, to a certain extent, her complete isolation and reduction as a woman and artist. A far cry from Maria's ambitious studies, her swansong appears as a quasi-mechanical, repetitive and fragmented last glimpse of what remains of the musician Maria, who finishes her life as Alexander's ideal and with whom the stereotype of Romantic love evaporates literally into the sky – the narration breaks off the girl's simplistic tune while the artificially Romantic tone of the novel's last lines only reinforce the gruesomeness of the couple's death: 'In der schönsten Nacht des irdischen Lebens erhoben sich ihre Geister zu den Sternen. 'Du bist bey mir, ich bin bey Dir/Bis an mein Lebens Ende'. So sang Maria noch zu ihrer Laute, eine Stunde vor der ewigen Vereinigung mit Alexander'.<sup>42</sup>

In *Der Günstling*, Caroline Auguste Fischer dramatizes common concepts of female song as an ideal object of desire and sublimity seen from the perspective of the male subject. Maria's budding artistic identity is not only misunderstood and brushed aside by her foster-father but in a way sabotaged and smothered in his

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.173.



attempt to make her his wife, before Maria is able to find some sort of artistic identity.<sup>43</sup> Female song is first and foremost dismissed as a male-construed illusion and a dangerous, wrong ideal of musical femininity that, literally, leaves little or no space for the female voice per se and as a sign of female self-expression. On the other hand, Fischer does not let her female protagonist off easily either. Maria clearly fails to break free from her own idealized misconceptions regarding art and love, and eventually prefers the status as a muse to the uncertainty and the realism of the woman performer. Thus, Fischer leaves the question of who is to blame in the tragic development of the story unanswered – the only answer to this question could lie in the critical dismantlement of the false ideals of art, love and femininity within the gendered discourse of late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics. Fischer's treatment of the romantic ideal of love and the female muse is extremely interesting in this novel as she subtly deconstructs the motif of the angelic, innocent young girl with the stunning talent in music who ends up sacrificing everything, including her life, for her love and marriage to Alexander. By debating this motif, the author ironically criticizes contemporary ideals of art and love, due to which the woman ends up sacrificing herself, ceasing to learn, to grow and develop both personality and artistic agency, whereas the male protagonist uses his muse to complement his own persona, his masculinity. Fischer's dramatization of the female character's silence, her lack of a true perspective and failure to acquire an identity for herself testifies to the difficulties of women in escaping the dogma of ideal femininity made worse through the fantasy of musical sublimity and ambivalence. This constitutes a leitmotival conflict in Fischer's œuvre which she focalizes through the plight of the artistically gifted woman – Maria's Mignon-pastiche is thus a bitterly ironic view on the crucial issue of female self-expression.

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<sup>43</sup> When Maria ceases her opera studies, Alexander comments rather matter-of-factly on the considerable loss for the artistic world, implying that this loss is not only insignificant, but that Maria will far better fulfil the naturally appropriate role as his wife.

## Anything But Music: *Margarethe* (1812)

Fischer's last novel *Margarethe* is not specifically a singer's novel, yet female song fulfils a key function in the novel's narrative aesthetics and character developments. Together with Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* and Caroline Pichler's *Frauenwürde* (1818),<sup>44</sup> *Margarethe* is the only substantial female contribution to the artist novel genre of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, addressing issues of artistic agency and female self-expression in their interdependence with Romantic concepts of love and art. *Margarethe* is the most accomplished of all of Fischer's novels, as she develops particularly daring and liberated female characters well before other German women writers followed suit, which has prompted critics to classify *Margarethe* as not only radically unique but as the true female reply to early Romantic artist novels written by men,<sup>45</sup> as well as their implied art concepts.<sup>46</sup> As we shall see, Fischer continues the critical view on 'ideal femininity' as expressed through music and song that she developed in *Der Günstling*, and takes the stereotype of the harp-girl to a different level by developing escape routes away from the static stance of the muse and from male expectations, towards autonomy and female self-expression.

### Synopsis

*The painter Stephani, who has come to Florence to seek a career, falls in love with the dancer Rosamunde, in whom he believes he has found his muse, but who rejects him. He subsequently turns his desire towards Margarethe, an innocent, angelic girl whom he immortalizes in his paintings. Gretchen,<sup>47</sup> as she is known, is wooed by both Stephani and the Prince of Florence; however, she rejects both men and retreats into a secular convent which she founded herself in order to carry out charitable projects. Rosamunde dies the untimely death of the artist, whereas Stephani spends his life chasing the feminine ideal and eventually dies of a venereal*

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<sup>44</sup> Caroline Pichler, *Frauenwürde, Sämtliche Werke*, 60 vol. (Wien: Pichler, 1828-1844), 11.

<sup>45</sup> The critic of the *Leipziger Literaturzeitung* remarked upon the novel's uniqueness and outstanding quality: 'Wer Gustav's Verirrungen gelesen hat, wird von diesem neuen Romane nichts Gewöhnliches erwarten, und sich in seinen Erwartungen keineswegs getäuscht sehen' (LLZ 321 (24.12.1812), pp.2567-68).

<sup>46</sup> See Runge, 'Wenn Schillers Geist', p.193.

<sup>47</sup> The Goethe allusion is evident in *Margarethe*, both through the heroine's Faustian name and through her depiction as the archetypal beautiful soul of *Wilhelm Meister* – Margarethe therefore embodies two important types of femininity from the Goethe era.

disease: *'Leidenschaftliche Liebe für die Kunst wie für die Weiber, grub sein frühzeitiges Grab'*.<sup>48</sup>

As Stephani's fate tellingly implies, the novel centres on the topoi of love and art and their interconnection through the three main characters, Margarethe, Stephani and Rosamunde. The drama arises out of the women's claim to personal and artistic agency as opposed to the male artist's need to appropriate either woman as his muse and make her immortal through his painting – here, Fischer discusses fundamental issues of the discourse on art: is male artistic procreativity more important than a woman's wish for personal and artistic independence? Can a woman claim agency or can she only exist as part of the universal, male sphere? As distinct from Maria, both Gretchen and Rosamunde reject these concepts as they reject Stephani and the Prince in order to secure their own personal and/or artistic self-sufficiency.

Although not professional singers in the strict sense, both heroines are confronted with the ideal of female musicality and its implications as a male fantasy, the dismantlement of which constitutes an important stepping-stone in their emancipation. As she becomes a muse for Stephani and the prince, it is not surprising to see that at certain points in the novel, Gretchen appears in the garb and pose of the angelic muse with her harp. She is initially presented to both men as the archetypal Mignon-angel, wearing a long silvery dress and her hair down – the irony of the motif becomes apparent in the contrast between Gretchen's embarrassment over her silly appearance and Stephani's rapture when gazing upon her as though she were a heaven-sent muse:

Ich habe eine himmlische Erscheinung gehabt, und in meine ganz umdüsterte Seele ist ein belebender Lichtstrahl gefallen. [...] Ich trete näher, sehe ein Wunder unvergleichlicher Schönheit, eine Jungfrau im höchsten Sinne des Worts. Meine Knie wollen sich beugen. [...] Ich erkenne das himmlische Kind, was mir im Fieber einst Trank reichte. Aber die göttliche Erscheinung wendet sich von mir und verschwindet.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> GW III, p.351.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.152-54.



The Prince, who is infatuated by the girl's angelic allure, similarly to Alexander's obsession with Maria, encourages Gretchen in *girling*,<sup>50</sup> seeing to her overall education and musical instruction, as would seem fit for a girl of a respectable background – a sign of his favour for her, this specific education would normally not be accessible to Gretchen, since she comes from a modest background. However there is no doubt that Gretchen's education does not serve the purpose of personal or artistic maturity but rather what I have discussed as the irrelevant, bourgeois female upbringing intertwined with the ideal of female song in chapters 2 and 3: 'Und du wirst jetzt eine ordentliche vornehme Dame, und sollst Clavier und Harfe spielen, und Singen und Zeichnen lernen, und gar nicht mehr für die Leute nähen'.<sup>51</sup>

Gretchen complies with the cultivation of this type of feminine ideal for a short while, embracing her education and the musical practice out of gratitude as well as out of her own artistic inclination, while being entirely oblivious of the social implications of her training, which aims to make her a suitable spouse for the Prince.

Ich kann nur die Hände falten, und manchmal auf das Clavier, und manchmal auf die Harfe blicken. Und dann kann ich das Weinen nicht lassen, denn ich bin gar zu selig, und der ganze herrliche Tag, wo ich so viel lernen werde, steht mir vor Augen.<sup>52</sup>

However, her contentment does not last. In order to please the prince, who grows more and more infatuated with her, Gretchen sings a song to him, in an innocent, naïve kind of way, oblivious of both the prince's and Stephani's true feelings and desires for her.<sup>53</sup> Here, the author once more uses the image of the musical offer of the singing girl to her male mentor. In a scene reminiscent of Mignon's *Italienlied* and her swansong, *So lasst mich scheinen*, as well as of Maria's singing to Alexander, Gretchen takes up her place outside the prince's chamber, clad in a white dress with belt, ready to sing and play the harp (a stereotypical image which

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<sup>50</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>51</sup> *GW* III, pp.146-47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.166.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

emphasizes the girl's static muse pose); a pose which proves difficult for the girl to assume:

Der Herr Präsident ließ mich auf das Schloss fahren, und meine Harfe wurde mir bis in das Vorzimmer gebracht. Als ich aber an des Fürsten Zimmer treten sollte, wurde mir bange, und ich dachte: ach, die Harfe ist so schwer! Wie ungeschickt wirst du damit hineinkommen! Aber es ging besser, als ich dachte.

Dicht neben der Tür ist eine Erhöhung, auf diese kniete ich, und setzte die Harfe etwas tiefer vor mir nieder. Ich sagte nichts, sondern fing gleich an zu spielen und zu singen. Es überraschte den Fürsten außerordentlich, und gefiel ihm über die Maßen; denn er kam in großer Bewegung auf mich zu, und sagte: was kniest du Engel? Steh' auf!

Ich aber blieb immer noch liegen, und spielte das Lied erst ganz aus, und sang die letzten Verse, welche die schönsten sind, viel besser als die ersten. Die große Freude, dass ich ihm mit so schönen Worten danken konnte, trieb alle Angst von mir weg, *und die Harfe klang, wie im Traume.*

Er aber nahm sie mir aus dem Arme, und sagte wiederum: O, steh' auf! Wer kann dich so sehen!<sup>54</sup>

Fischer sabotages the muse-figure subtly but unambiguously. Similarly to Maria's musical apprenticeship, Gretchen's musical practice is compromised by the male gaze, through which she finds herself in the position of the angelic muse, an incarnation of sublime music as well as an object of male desire – the image of the harp-playing muse is dismantled as pretence to allow the prince to approach the girl. Whereas in *Wilhelm Meister*, Mignon's songs were objects of poetic dispute and very complex expressions of the poetic girl's psyche, what counts in Gretchen's scene is the girl's image, dressed as an angel and holding the harp. What's more, Gretchen suffers from this static stance, experiencing her instrument as heavy, although her joy in playing it and singing her beautiful song initially outweighs her doubts. The prince is pursuing entirely different aims, as is rendered through his adoration of the 'angel' and his taking Gretchen's harp away. The emptiness of the muse figure becomes apparent, as Gretchen's music is not at all important; what matters is the prince's reaction to her, and his symbolical appropriation of the girl by taking away her instrument. Women's sublimity in music appears rather degrading in reality, illustrating the musical double-bind of sublime ideal and carnal desire. Nevertheless, the narration develops autonomous energies in Gretchen's musical practice, as we are confronted with her own perspective on music and on her

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.176-77. My emphasis.

musical practice. Despite her kind nature and her will to please and thank the prince for his patronage, she is clearly not at ease. The pose of the harp girl is a burden more than a pleasure; although it constitutes one possible model of female musicality, and complies with the ideal of female song outlined previously, it is geared towards a male perspective, binding the female singer into a fixed posture with a specific repertoire of female characteristics and the objective of enhancing her sexual attractiveness. However, Gretchen liberates herself from this pose and, in doing so, from any male claims on her – the sound of the harp which she initially experienced like a (bad) dream during her performance for the prince becomes part of a new musical language, which is a part of her dreams and of the imaginary:

Mir ist, als wäre ich in den Himmel gekommen. Des Nachts träum' ich auch immer von Engeln, träume, dass ich schon die Harfe und das Klavier spielen könnte, und dass sie mir zuhörten. Die Harfe, die mir immer etwas schwer vorkommt, und mich manchmal, weil ich sie noch nicht recht zu halten verstehe, ein wenig drückt, ist mir im Traume ganz leicht. Ja, ich schwebe mit ihr frei in der Luft, singe aus voller Brust Lieder, die ich in meinem Leben nicht hörte, greife voll Zuversicht in die Saiten, und bebe von unaussprechlicher Wonne wenn sie ertönen.<sup>55</sup>

Gretchen's dream prefigures what she will eventually become: a sublime creature, but on her own terms, living and working within the convent. The musical gesture becomes a cipher for her higher vocation, as the image of divine harmony becomes synonymous with her finding a vocation in life for the sake of a higher cause, which implies refusing both Stephani and the Prince, for whom she ceases to play. Where Maria complied with paradigms pertaining to the musical feminine through her dreamed experience of music as part of her entire focus on Alexander, it is the exact opposite in Margarethe's dream of music. Singing becomes key to her understanding of a higher order, a divine harmony to which she wants to vow her existence and in which she alone exists, independently of a male partner: 'Singen konnt' ich es, und sing es auch, wenn ich allein bin. O Mutter, es antwortet mir! – Ist das Gott? – O geliebte Mutter! Ich glaube, das ist Gott!'<sup>56</sup>

The key to her existence lies in this divine music, which brings her into harmony with her surroundings, showing a transformation from the muse figure making

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.165-66.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.298-99.



music for the pleasure of the prince to that of an independent woman experiencing her own female agency as music – her rapture and sublimity in musical terms and images. Music becomes a personal experience and ceases to be directed at a male listener or spectator, or channelled through the performance of the muse. Thus, she may not remain a ‘singer’ in the proper sense of the term, or, in this case, in compliance with the ideal associated with the woman singer; but the motif of song, and of female music does emphasize her empowerment and autonomy.

With *Margarethe*, Caroline Auguste Fischer may have indeed given a female reply to the late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century ideal of the poetic self in music, but she may equally have taken inspiration from Staël’s treatment of female performance and discourse in *Corinne*. In *Margarethe*, music is no longer a male-authored poetic concept, but becomes a liberation from the emptiness of the muse figure, and in turn a carrier of female agency and independence, through which the protagonist realizes her purpose as a human being. The harmless *girling* and harping have indeed become a song of triumph for the female subject.

Mir war, als sey diese himmlische Wahrheit erst jetzt gefunden, die Menschen auf ewig durch sie geädelt, und ihres göttlichen Ursprunges vergewissert. Sie klingen mir, wie Triumphgesang. So ruf’ ich sie Morgens der Sonne entgegen, so wiederhol’ ich sie, wenn die Sterne mir leuchten. Mein ganzes Dasein enträthseln sie mir, und ich brauche nichts mehr, als sie, um Alles zu begreifen, was mir dunkel war.<sup>57</sup>

As in all her novels, Fischer diametrically opposes two types of femininity: Margarethe’s antagonist is Rosamunde, the dancer Stephani loves and woos in vain at the beginning of the novel. In Rosamunde’s case, the use of music is summed up in a few sentences, although it is perhaps, in the light of the present discussion, the most interesting use of music so far and deserves a closer look.

A contrasting figure to Gretchen’s pose as sublime muse and harp-girl, the dancer Rosamunde is a strong, independent woman who has no illusions about men’s interest in women and, in the case of Stephani, the male appropriation of the female body through the idealisation of the eternal feminine and for the sake of his own art. Rosamunde has no interest in becoming anybody’s muse, which would

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<sup>57</sup> *GW* III, p.326.

equal a regression into the passive state of inspiration for a male artist, and the status of his wife at best – something which she is urged to consider, but which is unlikely given her social status. As an artist, Rosamunde has taken a double risk: a dancer, she practices a volatile art form which, contrary to Stephani's paintings, does not last but exists only in the moment of performance. The Prince confronts Rosamunde with this fact, reproaching her selfishness in refusing to accommodate Stephani's obsession and accept the honour of becoming his lover and art object. The Prince urges Rosamunde to remember her place as a woman within society and art, and to respect her 'natural' femininity; her purpose should be to serve the male artist and complement him, sacrificing her love and beauty for the sake of Stephani's artistic procreation:

Sie haben nur Gefühl für Ihren eigenen Werth. Doch stirbt Ihre Kunst mit Ihnen. Nicht so bei ihm! Er wird von ihr überlebt. Nach Jahrhunderten werden seine Bilder ergötzen, und Menschen über Erdennoth erheben. Ein unvergängliches Denkmal könnten Sie sich stiften, wenn Sie sein Leben verlängerten.<sup>58</sup>

In defiance of patriarchal art concepts Rosamunde remains intact as an artist who stands her own ground, even openly criticizing both Stephani's and the Prince's unrealistic, egocentric claims about ideal femininity. From the dancer's perspective, a woman belongs first and foremost to herself, and to no man.<sup>59</sup> Going against the pose of the harp-girl, and literally against 'posing' for Stephani, the dancer Rosamunde transposes music into the movements of her body and into true sensations. Her choice of profession was born out of silence and out of the fact that she retreated as a child into her own world, where she could calmly voice her own thoughts and put her ideas into art. Rosamunde explains her artistic choice as follows:

Tief lag es als Ahnung in meiner Seele, dass dieses der geheime Sinn aller Künste, und der Grund aller Gewalt sey, welche sie an den Menschen üben. Ich hatte beweisen gesehen, dass Töne Gestalten hervorbringen, und diese hohe Bedeutung würde mich zur Musik hingezogen haben, hätte sie mich nicht zu gewaltsam ergriffen; so dass ich meine Empfindung durch Tanz ausdrücken, oder untergehen

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.126-27.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

musste. So war mir dann das Räthsel meiner Jugend gelöst, und der Entschluss, als tragische Tänzerin aufzutreten, befestigt.<sup>60</sup>

Rosamunde moves as far away from the passive stance of the muse figure as possible, leading a financially and artistically independent life, avoiding the pose of the singer, who, among possible images of female artistry, appears drawn to passivity and to appropriation by a male-authored discourse on music and woman. As we have seen in the discussion of the musical-literary discourse, the dancer is indeed a volatile, a moving, figure, the attraction of the female dancer lying in her unique rapport with music, which she translates into bodily, sensual movement, while at the same time escaping the fixed pose of the muse-singer.<sup>61</sup>

In fact, as a counter-image, she is the exact opposite of the harp girl, especially as she could never be the ideal woman with the harp who sings to either the Prince or Stephani, due to the social implications of her profession. While the dancer's social issues are not explicitly elaborated in the novel, I have briefly touched upon the polemic debate surrounding women as performing artists and the ambivalent connotations attached to the stage performer's singing, acting or dancing, as opposed to more noble artistic endeavours such as writing, or painting. It becomes clear from the Prince's remarks that, in his view, a dancer can be no artistic match for a painter, whose craft belongs to high art and to the realm of poetry, whereas the dancer belongs to the group of 'popular' artists and performers, and is therefore clearly associated with immorality and prostitution.<sup>62</sup> While Stephani is obsessed with her, Rosamunde is the subject not only of the prince's contempt (because she dares to question him), but also of the public's volatile mood and slander. At one point, alluding to her social inappropriateness, onlookers cynically deplore the fact that Rosamunde is merely a dancer: 'Schade, dass sie nicht Schauspielerin ist – rief letzt ein unerträglicher Mensch. Gott sey gelobt, dass sie nicht Schauspielerin ist! – rief ich mit glühenden Wangen. Der dumme hässliche Mensch schien auf eine spitzige Antwort zu sinnen'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.85-86.

<sup>61</sup> See Smith, 'Chorégraphie', p.8. Fischer uses dance less poetically than Staël does in *Corinne*, but in the equally interesting way of implying artistic movement and subversion, comparable to Mignon's restlessness.

<sup>62</sup> See pp.33ff; Runge, 'Wenn Schillers Geist', p.196.

<sup>63</sup> *GW* III, p.25.



Again, one may argue for an intertextual link between Rosamunde and Corinne, given the overwhelming reception of Staël's novel in German and the likelihood of Fischer's sound reading culture.<sup>64</sup> Be that as it may, Fischer's treatment of the dramatic dancer as well as her role in the novel is quite different from Corinne, whose Tarantella is one facet of her overall, inherent musicality which embraces all art forms. While in both cases, the implications of female corporeality and sensuality are crucial, the dancer Rosamunde is, insofar as her musicality and voice are concerned, Corinne's exact opposite, since she decides *against* music as it is embodied in song and singer, and instead pursues a career as a dancer. Corinne never decides against music – on the contrary, as explained in the previous chapter, Staël grounds her entire being in musicality and the integrative, synaesthetic power of her voice.

In Fischer's novel, though, Rosamunde consciously decides against song as the most Romantic of all art forms, as a possible and rather accessible career choice for women yet as part of the problematic discourse on woman and music, prone to male idealization and appropriation. Instead, she has chosen one of the most daring professions for a woman around that time: that of a dramatic dancer. By going down the route of the most extreme form of female corporeality, Rosamunde reaches a state of personal and artistic freedom unmatched by other female characters discussed so far and which underlines my argument about female song and the singer as a type of artistry that shows a very ambiguous potential for both female agency and the male-authored muse-figure, especially in Early Romanticism. In a way, Rosamunde avoids the poetic and performative ambiguity of singer and song by going straight for the more outrageously physical profession of the dancer, and thus, she reaches personal and artistic freedom. She experiences herself as an autonomous, professional artistic subject and claims artistic relevance for her profession, wanting to be a part of and to shape the socio-cultural discourse of her time.<sup>65</sup>

Gretchen, who refuses the pose of the harp-playing muse, claims this personal freedom and socio-cultural relevance in a different manner, finding her 'song'

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<sup>64</sup> Runge makes the assumption ('Wenn Schillers Geist', p.194).

<sup>65</sup> *GW* III, p.82.

through her renunciation of and her dedication to charity, which is her take on heavenly music and constitutes her own song of triumph. Both women retain their autonomy until their death. Rosamunde, who the narration implies suffers from tuberculosis, follows a path of radical autonomy by not only rejecting Stephani (to the point of making herself unhappy), but also almost consciously willing her own death out of spite and bitterness about women's fate in society and the wrongdoings of men against women: 'Ich will die Schmach dieses schändlich misshandelten Geschlechts nicht länger mit ansehen. Ich bin dem Tod geweiht, will es seyn, wer darf es mir wehren?'<sup>66</sup>

Although seeing Grete's sublimity triggers her agony and untimely death, she has no illusions either about the fate of the muse or about the possibility for artistic collaboration between male and female artists.<sup>67</sup> Unmasking the ideal behind the sublime feminine, the dancer has no regrets about her own firm refusal to be incorporated into a male-authored work of art:

Diejenige, welcher er jetzt huldigt, wird nun auch eine gewisse Celebrität erhalten. Ihr Bild ist zu einem Altarblatte bestimmt. Nur auf diese, oder auf eine ähnliche Weise, ist es möglich, dass eben diese Berühmtheit, zu welcher sie durch ihn gelangt, ihr nichts bei ihm schade. Denn so weit ich die Männer kenne, ist die Berühmtheit, nächst dem Alter, der Hässlichkeit und der Kränklichkeit, derjenige Fehler, welchen sie am empfindlichsten rächen, und vielleicht hat es, seit Männer leben, kaum zehn gegeben, welche wahrhaft groß genug waren, eine große Frau zu ertragen.<sup>68</sup>

As a dramatic dancer, not as a harp girl or professional singer, Rosamunde remains intact in the double sense of the word, defying socio-cultural paradigms as well as aesthetic concepts, both as a woman artist and as a dancer who does not compromise her art. She may not sing in the proper sense of the term, yet she possesses a clear, distinct, emancipated voice of her own which resonates strongly throughout the novel and which voices the possibility of the autonomous, female *artist*, who becomes a part of and shapes socio-cultural discourse.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>67</sup> See Runge, 'Die Dramatik', p.109.

<sup>68</sup> *GW* III, p.231.

Both Margarethe and Rosamunde find ways of rejecting the ideal of musical femininity, which is exposed as an illusion, tied to the male subject's desires and fantasies. Through such a rejection, both women are able to realize for themselves some form of valid, empowering female art practice. By proposing an artistic novel which does not centre on music, and female characters who choose to go beyond the image of the musical feminine, Fischer not only plays with and undermines patriarchal concepts of female song in Early Romantic texts, but she stands out among other writers of the time who made use of female song, often to purvey the cliché of the musical feminine and of the ideal of femininity as expressed through song, but not to convey true, real female artistry. Fischer's staging of the woman artist is therefore not so much a poetically abstract concept as rather an attempt to explore possible *female* artistry as part of female life, and as a viable route for women to achieve personal and artistic autonomy – this gives Fischer's protagonists a very human quality, beyond traditional gender paradigms.



## A Song of Freedom? *Justine* (1818)

Although Fischer's short stories have not been studied in detail so far, they form an important aspect of understanding this author's work, since they succinctly sum up her key statements on the blend of gender and art ideologies, and their implications and consequences for women. In the following case, these are explicitly catalysed through the fate of the woman singer. *Justine*, one of Fischer's last pieces to have been preserved, may well be her most remarkable statement on female musical practice.

### Synopsis

*Upon her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Justine, a well-bred girl, faces her father's expectation to take up her proper place in society and marry Walter, her father's assistant and confidant of many years, on whom he wishes to bestow his fortune. However, Justine refuses her father's plan and its underlying concept of bourgeois marriage, exposing it as an illusion on the part of both women and men. Quoting her late mother, the girl denounces marriage as a patriarchal prison for women who only pretend to be loving wives and mothers – a thought which naturally upsets Justine's father, who always thought of his wife as the most angelic and devoted of all women and mothers. In what follows, Justine puts her radical thoughts into practice, by studying to become a singer and thus emancipate herself. After her father's death she goes on to have a brilliant singing career in England. Returning to Germany a few years later, she comes face to face with Walter, his wife Sophie and their son, and thus with the domestic ideal. The encounter leaves Justine broken-hearted and soon afterwards, she dies.*

By all accounts, Justine is a striking model of femininity, both in terms of her emancipation and her artistic vocation. With the novella moving at a fast pace, Justine's polemics and her subsequent actions are condensed and to the point: the drama unfolds quickly and reaches a prompt, tragic end. From her mere appearance just as much as from her argument with her father, it becomes clear that Justine stands outside traditional values and models and that she must follow a special path beyond the confines of her bourgeois upbringing. A transgressor as artist and woman, she appears as a hybrid creature with the strangely mixed colouring of 'dark-eyed blonde', an aberration of nature to which her father ascribes her rebelliousness: 'Doch ist diese Blondscharze, Gott sey gelobt! Eine Art

Naturmerkwürdigkeit. Was würde aus uns werden, wenn es einige Millionen ihres Gleichen gäbe!’<sup>69</sup>

Her exceptional character becomes especially evident during the polemical dispute with her father that dominates the middle part of the story. Justine does not want to comply with her father’s plans and marry Walter, directly questioning traditional models of femininity and bourgeois life as a wife and mother, as well as the general power hierarchies and discrepancies between men and women. Addressing the areas of dispute in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century writings on women’s education, Justine identifies one of the main causes of the inequality between men and women in the lack of adequate education for women who, if they were only given the chance, could actually outshine men: ‘Ebenfalls ist es unleugbar, daß alle Schwestern, die mit ihren Brüdern gleichen Unterricht erhielten, diese in kurzem weit hinter sich ließen’.<sup>70</sup>

Picking up on her mother’s radical thoughts and thus inscribing herself in a feminist tradition, Justine calls for more female autonomy, which can only be brought about by women themselves, through education, independence and their own impact on history. Very much in the image of Mary Wollstonecraft or Isabelle de Charrière, Fischer shows intellectual allegiance to 18th-century and post-Rousseauesque ideals, yet raises the question of gendered history writing, and male dominance in the literary canon:

Lies die Geschichte unsers bedauernswerten Geschlechts, eine Geschichte nicht von Weibern, sondern von Männern geschrieben, [...] aber an einer vollständigen und gut geschriebenen Geschichte des weiblichen Geschlechts fehlt es (wahrscheinlich aus guten Gründen) bis diesen Augenblick, und ich kann dir nur eine sehr mittelmäßige und fragmentarische empfehlen.<sup>71</sup>

Justine’s argument with her father is direct and aggressive, showing a very progressive state of mind with regard to women’s emancipation and the equation of women’s rights with human rights, a central issue of the French Revolution feminists.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *GW* II, p.302.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.286.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.288-89.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.291.

Justine is a protagonist in the spirit of Fischer's initial statement in *Gustavs Verirrungen*, who through logic and reason demolishes her father's patriarchal arguments on the unalterable nature of women and femininity, and argues against the traditional gender doctrines discussed earlier. Whereas her father states what a good, 'natural' woman should be, how she should talk and think – 'Diese Denkungsart ist nicht weiblich'<sup>73</sup> – Justine, through her arguments and logical thinking, discovers the falseness of these claims and traditions and the potential for change. Justine follows in the footsteps of Fischer's other heroines like Rosamunde or Margarethe by insisting on friendship and equality as the only valid basis of marriage:

Daß ich keinen Herrn heirathe, sondern einen Freund. Daß ich gegen die Anmaßung des ersten die von meiner Mutter angerathenen Mittel nicht gebrauchen will, weil ich sie meiner unwürdig halte, [...] Mein Vater! Ich heirathe nicht, und musste, redlich zu seyn, so gegen Walthern zu handeln, um ihm alle Hoffnung zu benehmen.<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately, Justine's rational thinking enables her to break free from preconceived models of female life in order to claim an identity of her own, independent yet with the claim for social integration. Refusing domestic life and the role of wife and mother, she undergoes a strictly personal evolution, finding both that personal freedom and the education she considers quintessential for female autonomy in music – in the dispute with her father, Justine had hinted at the arts as a possible escape route for women who did not conform to society's ideals of female beauty and domesticity: 'Alles was ihnen, ihr Unglück zu mildern, übrig bleibt, ist, sich von Künsten und (aber ja recht heimlich) so viel von Wissenschaften zuzueignen, als möglich ist'.<sup>75</sup> As a singer, Justine undergoes a development comparable to Maria in *Der Günstling*, with the crucial difference that, contrary to Maria who ends her days as a harpist muse, Justine accesses a liberated and accomplished existence through her successful singing career, which implies her performing in front of an audience. From the archetypal *girling* at the beginning of

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.301.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.299/300.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.285. This is an interesting reply which stands in stark contrast to the ideal of female beauty developed around 1800 and outlined earlier.



the story– she is making music with Walter on her birthday – she graduates to being a celebrated singer abroad, taking the potential, but also the polemics of female musicality all the way from the domestic salon to the public stage. The *girling* at the story's opening is naturally tied to Walter, the prospective husband Justine rejects, just as she refuses domesticity and a pre-conceived gender role for the sake of her personal and artistic freedom:

Die kleine Gesellschaft ist gebeten, und alles so angeordnet, wie Sie es befohlen. Wir trinken Thee in meinem Zimmer und essen diesen Abend im Garten. Walther und ich haben das Duett so oft wiederholt, dass sie gewiss zufrieden seyn werden. Wird er es auch seyn?<sup>76</sup>

Justine realizes that music is her true vocation and dedicates herself completely to the art form. Music is a conscious choice (between music and painting for both of which she has talent and inclination), her reasons being economic as well as artistic: 'welche ihr die sicherste Stütze werden und von welcher sie hoffen könne, sie auf den möglichsten Grad der Vollkommenheit zu bringen'.<sup>77</sup> Although she does not elaborate further, the narrator implicitly draws on music's poetic ideal and sublime nature and links it to the more secular and performative aspect of singing as a potential career choice for women and a means to make money and maintain themselves. In this, Fischer goes further than previous authors, and adopts a rare position in the literature of the time, where the social implications of the woman singer are either not voiced directly, because of the paradigmatic conflict between song as ideal femininity and the issues of the woman performer, or because, more generally, song is an expression of the abstract musical ideal.

Fischer ties in the feminine ideal with its realist implications however, and combines the poetic quality of song with its economic and performative dimension, presenting the woman singer as a complete, dignified and autonomous noble artist. All seems for the best when Justine becomes a brilliant singer who can make even her father proud:

Sie sah bald, daß dieses nur die Musik seyn könne, und widmete sich ihr mit einem so leidenschaftlichen Ernste, dass ihre Fortschritte den Vater wie die Lehrer bald in

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.259.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.303. This is consistent with the socio-cultural dimension of women singers (see chapter 2).

das höchste Erstaunen versetzten. Eine so silberreine, starke und biegsame Stimme, einen so edeln, von aller Manier so entfernten Vortrag erinnerten sich Kenner nicht gehört zu haben. Bald wurde Justine nicht allein der Stolz ihres Vaters, sondern ihrer sehr bedeutenden Vaterstadt, und die Verzweiflung der durchreisenden Künstler und besonders der Künstlerinnen.<sup>78</sup>

Her artistic maturity coincides with her personal independence when, upon her father's death, she realizes that she must become the provider for herself, a realization based upon which she starts a completely new life - her rebirth as a woman and an artist is symbolically fuelled by her selling her mother's jewels in order to finance her emigration to England, 'wo sie als eine der ersten Sängern auftrat'.<sup>79</sup> Again, Fischer uses very interesting imagery here in that she emphasizes the importance of the protagonist's symbolic rebirth as a singer. Not only is Justine regarded as the first singer of England, a *prima donna assoluta*, but, even more importantly, as a morally and artistically perfect and pure creature, of whom nothing negative is ever said, either as a singer or as a woman. In contrast to Madame de Staël, Caroline Fischer depicts England not as an oppressive country, but as the utopia and ultimate justice for the female artist: 'So fing sie dann an, das Volk, welches ihr so vollkommene Gerechtigkeit widerfahren ließ, mit Vorliebe und ihr tief gesunkenes Vaterland mit Widerwillen zu betrachten'.<sup>80</sup>

With such an ideal evocation of female artistry, especially in its socio-cultural implications, one almost expects Fischer to introduce a twist to the story. Indeed, Justine's happiness as a woman and artist is short-lived, her downfall related in a few pages, which almost prompts the suspicion that Fischer wants the utopian image of the singer to disintegrate quite quickly. Justine's return to Germany immediately confronts her with the patriarchal values she rejected so vehemently. Upon her confrontation with Walter's family life, Justine loses consciousness, a prefiguration of her death - as we have seen in the two previous case studies, the physical demise is a key narrative element in the depiction of the singer as a physically damaged, because 'unnatural' woman, who defies biological and social dogmas of marriage

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<sup>78</sup> *GW* II, pp.303-04.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.305.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.305. This is indeed an interesting geo-cultural implication since Fischer displaces her protagonist away from Germany, the country of music, to England, a relative no-man's land in terms of music.

and motherhood, while at the same time making a claim for the impossible reconciliation between the sublime ideal of song and the female performing body.

Thus, the end of the story almost resembles a *post scriptum* to Justine's breakdown, and echoes similar ruptures between the poetic and physical self as seen in Mignon and Corinne. Fischer stages a last confrontation between Justine's and Walter's life styles as a purgatory for the singer, before her actual death, in which she is confronted with the ideal image of family life, embodied by Walter's wife Sophie and their son Fritz. This confrontation proves to be Justine's undoing, as it serves the double purpose of classifying Justine as an outcast from the bourgeois order while at the same time clarifying Walther's feelings and relationship towards the singer. Suffering from his unrequited love for Justine, Walter (an emotionally and psychologically unstable character) found refuge in the arms of his ideal wife Sophie – it is no coincidence that her name recalls the ideal woman whom Rousseau intended for his *Émile*. Sophie completes Walter as his 'schützender Genius'.<sup>81</sup> The male protagonist's inability to engage in a relationship with the woman artist results in the bourgeois, safe and respectable union with a more appropriate and complementing female character (although in Justine's case she consciously refused Walter as a husband). Justine's final downfall is brought about by her conversation with Sophie who tries to impress upon the singer the traditional values of marriage and motherhood. According to Sophie, a woman without love which expresses itself through marriage and parenthood, is incomplete as a human being as well as in her role in society, as she lacks 'den wesentlichen Bestandteil der Weiblichkeit: die Liebe'.<sup>82</sup>

The difference between the two women could not be more apparent: where Justine is an open, aggressive fighter against women's suppression and enslavement, Sophie argues for the female virtues of passive manipulation, amiability and patience, since she is convinced that women should not free themselves from the chains of patriarchy, but rather wait for men to take off the chains, which would be the only appropriate and 'naturally' feminine attitude:

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<sup>81</sup> *GW* II, p.309. A term which evokes not only the image of the muse, but possibly also Mignon who, throughout the novel, acts as a protective force for Wilhelm, a function which is eventually taken over by his biological child Felix.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.311-12.



In vielen Gegenden des Erdbodens sind überdies unsre Ketten nur noch Theaterketten, welche von den Schauspielern, statt ihnen angeschmiedet zu sein, nur mit den Händen gehalten werden und hinter den Theaterwänden abfallen. Bald werden die Männer sie uns lächelnd auf offener Bühne abnehmen und sie als überflüssigen Tand hinter sich werfen. Wie schön, wie weiblich, wenn wir das schweigend abwarten!<sup>83</sup>

Interestingly, Sophie uses theatrical allegory in her argument by calling women's oppression a staged and theatrical illusion, which implicitly questions Justine's choice of a career in the theatre and the 'realism' of her life on stage. Justine's existence as a singer and women's oppression are thus both situated within the realm of theatrical, staged illusions. Sophie ultimately dismisses and disqualifies Justine's existence as an artist as an excuse and an escape route for 'häßliche Frauen', women who are not beautiful in the traditional sense through their nature and function for men, and so have to renounce a happy life of marriage, motherhood and love. Nevertheless, after Justine's departure, Sophie tells Walther that the singer still loves him and that, should she herself die, only 'ihre große Seele, nur ihr schöner und gebildeter Geist könnte dich trösten'.<sup>84</sup>

Fleeing to Italy, Justine dies shortly after her encounter with Walther.<sup>85</sup> As a singer and a woman artist with her own agenda, she is marked as a transgressive, hybrid woman who is unable to embrace traditional models of social behaviour, motherhood, marriage, domesticity: 'Sie stirbt keines natürlichen Todes!'<sup>86</sup> Justine joins the ranks of other singers who die strange, unnatural deaths, a fact which, while it alludes to the staging of female song and of the singer as a sublimity, points towards the more dramatic implications of the image of the woman singer that I have made explicit in chapters 2 and 3: a hybrid woman and transgressor of seemingly 'natural' and social orders, the singer, neither wife nor mother, constitutes a biological, cultural and poetic taboo and thus cannot go on living. The death of the woman singer implies the fundamental conflict between body, voice and song and

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.315. See Duden, pp.127-37.

<sup>84</sup> *GW II*, p.325.

<sup>85</sup> After having situated Justine's emancipation in England, Fischer here makes an obvious reference to Italy as the country of art and genius established through Staël's *Corinne*. However, Fischer does not allow her heroine to experience artistic fulfillment but cuts the utopian vista short through Justine's death.

<sup>86</sup> *GW II*, p.326.

reflects on the problem and polemic which surrounds the figure of the singer as an unnatural woman in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Like Madame de Staël, Fischer develops the potential of a female character who both embodies the ideal of song and is able to reflect on it rationally. Yet in both cases, the singer is not able to sustain the potential of female agency, her identity and space as an artist outside social norms. More than other authors of her generation, Caroline Auguste Fischer critically discusses the illusion of female song as part of a musical and feminine ideal that constitutes an inherent part of musical-literary discourse. Juxtaposing the fantasy attached to female song with the struggle for female artistic empowerment, Fischer continuously weighs the ideal of the musical feminine against women's possibility to live and realize a viable form of artistic and personal agency. Thus, although she was indebted to 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century paradigms of singer and song, as well as earlier archetypes developed by Goethe and Staël, Fischer moved further in her negotiation of female song (and on a broader level, of the woman as *artist*) as a realist concept. As we move on to the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and French Writers of the July Monarchy, we shall see whether the figure of the singer is actually capable of purveying successful examples of female artistry, and to what extent the conflict between the ideal of the musical feminine and female musical performance can be resolved.

## Chapter 6

### French-German *Entgrenzung*:

### The Singer in the Works of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Honoré de Balzac and Hector Berlioz (1814-1844)

In the last two chapters I investigated the woman singer in fiction against the background of contemporary song ideals and practices, and I have shown that, starting with early archetypes of song, such as Mignon and Corinne, late 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideals of music and femininity, as outlined in chapters 2 and 3, are questioned and subverted by writers who discuss the artist as a paradoxical, conflictual character, at odds with the inherent discrepancy between song and performance and expressing the possibility of female artistic empowerment and agency. In contrast to the predominant poetic conceptualisation of female song in German Romanticism, Caroline Auguste Fischer polemicised the ideals attached to the musical feminine, but surprisingly, her unusual treatment of female song also finds a male-authored match in a much more canonical, but equally controversial, author: E. T. A. Hoffmann was specifically concerned with the issue of music and its expression through language; in particular through the writing of the musician and, as we shall see, the woman singer. This chapter will discuss the singer in selected musical narratives by E. T. A. Hoffmann, comparing them with their French emulations in the writings of Balzac and Berlioz and leading on to the discussion of the motif in female-authored works of the July Monarchy period in chapter 7. Like Goethe, Hoffmann, although read in very traditional terms, developed a surprisingly strong vision of female song, in connection with a critical questioning of traditional concepts of the ideal musical feminine. Looking back at the rationale behind my investigation, I will argue that the male authors discussed in this chapter are important cases in the ongoing, fluid discourse on the woman singer, which, although not losing its connection with 18<sup>th</sup>-century and Romantic ideals, gradually evolves towards more realist depictions of female artistry.



## (1) Facing a Phantasm: the Singer in E. T. A. Hoffmann's Literary Work

Ich denke mir mein Ich durch ein  
Vervielfältigungsglas – alle Gestalten, die sich  
um mich herum bewegen sind Ichs und ich  
ärgere mich über ihr tun und lassen.<sup>1</sup>

While Hoffmann scholarship is by no means sparse, it faces the challenge of rebalancing a traditionally depreciative and oversimplifying view of the *Hoffmannesque* Hoffmann, with its biographical readings and undertones of pathology and madness.<sup>2</sup> Thus, exposing as a cliché 'Hoffmann the mad artist' has led to the renewed discovery of a lawyer who was equally gifted as a musician and a writer and who, despite an undisputably eccentric nature, was respected and read as a literary success in his time. Between German idealism and the French *musicien-littérateurs* of the 1830s, Hoffmann, who said of himself that 'ich mag mich nicht nennen, indem mein Name nicht anders als durch eine gelungene musikalische Composition der Welt bekannt werden soll',<sup>3</sup> appeared as the quintessential poet-musician, whose understanding of and expertise in music is of importance to any discussion of his literary aesthetics and writings. Modern scholarship has increasingly opened up to the diversity and richness of Hoffmann's talents, which tends to make him more easily accessible as a major figure within the canon. Though the scholarly interest in Hoffmann the composer as an intrinsic part of Hoffmann the poet has been on the rise for the last twenty years,<sup>4</sup> substantial contributions to an interdisciplinary approach towards the author, in both

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<sup>1</sup> 6.11.1809, *Tagebücher*, edited by Friedrich Schnapp (München: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), p.107 (hereafter *TB*).

<sup>2</sup> *Die romantische Schule, Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979), VIII/1, p.193. The negative reception of Hoffmann, particularly in the German realm, is largely due to both Goethe's negative verdict and Heine's assessment in *Die romantische Schule*, which contributed to the creation of the 'Gespenster-Hoffmann' myth. Psychoanalysis and Freud's reading of the uncanny in *Der Sandmann* (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919) further emphasized this tradition of Hoffmann's reception.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Friedrich Karl Kunz, 20.07. 1813 (*Briefwechsel*, ed. Friedrich Schnapp, München: Winkler, 1967-1960, vol.I, p.399).

<sup>4</sup> Standard works include Klaus-Dieter Dobat, *Musik als romantische Illusion. Eine Untersuchung zur Bedeutung der Musikvorstellung E. T. A. Hoffmanns für sein literarisches Werk* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984); Friedrich Schnapp, *Der Musiker E. T. A. Hoffmann: ein Dokumentenband* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981).

music and literature, remain rare.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the strong link between Hoffmann's musical and literary aesthetics seems to have favoured stereotypical, 'Hoffmannesque' readings centred on commonplaces such as the mad musician, literary analogies to music, Romantic clichés, and finally, the female singer as an object of male creation and longing.<sup>6</sup>

To date, scholarship has not produced an exhaustive study of this polarizing character in Hoffmann's works. Staying with traditional readings of Romantic texts, scholars have offered rather stereotypical views of the female singer as a monster,<sup>7</sup> a (silenced) muse<sup>8</sup> and a catalyst for male creativity.<sup>9</sup> It seems that the traditional perception of Hoffmann's singers confines them to a triangle of passive musicality, male creativity and female death.<sup>10</sup>

Upon closer inspection, however, Hoffmann's singers do not seem to be so easily classifiable within late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup> – century concepts of art. Through a discussion of Hoffmann's aesthetics and their subsequent realization in his musical novellas, I shall question the traditional reading of the Hoffmannesque singer as a simplified, passive tool for male creativity and as confirmation of stereotypical art concepts. Rather, I would argue, the singer appears as a complex embodiment of Hoffmann's musical and literary *Weltanschauung* which, together with the author's

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<sup>5</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann *et la musique*, ed. Alain Montandon (Bern: Lang, 1987); Patrick Thewalt, *Die Leiden der Kapellmeister: zur Umwertung von Musik und Künstlertum bei W.H. Wackenroder und E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1990); Nora E. Haimberger, *Vom Musiker zum Dichter. E. T. A. Hoffmanns Akkordvorstellung* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> See Klaus-Dieter Dobat, 'Zwischen Genie und Handwerk. 'Geweiheter', Magier oder Mechaniker? Metamorphosen der Musikergestalt bei E. T. A. Hoffmann', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann et la musique*, pp.239-57; A recent study by the Hoffmann scholar Ricarda Schmidt deals with the author's overall intermediality: *Wenn mehrere Künste im Spiel sind: Intermedialität bei E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Jean Giraud, 'Éléments musicaux dans l'œuvre littéraire d'E. T. A. Hoffmann', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann et la musique*, pp.207-38.

<sup>7</sup> See Jean-Charles Margotton, 'Musique et folie. *Le Conseiller Krespel* de Hoffmann', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann et la musique*, pp.269-83.

<sup>8</sup> See Susanne Asche, *Die Liebe, der Tod und das Ich im Spiegel der Kunst: die Funktion des Weiblichen in Schriften der Frühromantik und im erzählerischen Werk E. T. A. Hoffmanns* (Königsstein: Hain, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> See Caduff, pp.260ff.

<sup>10</sup> See Christian Mattli, *Der Tod der Primadonna. Der Mensch als Instrument im literarischen Werk E. T. A. Hoffmanns* (Bern: Lang, 2003).

ironic scepticism of Romantic aesthetics,<sup>11</sup> makes of the woman singer a potentially subversive character. In what follows, I shall discuss singer and song, as conceptualized in the narratives *Rat Krespel*, *Das Sanctus* and *Kater Murr* as important explorations of female artistic empowerment.

### Hoffmann's Aesthetics of *Entgrenzung* and Dissonance

Hoffmann's musical agenda is not directly gender-specific, but is concerned with music in general terms. Although partial to the female singing voice, both as a professional musician and as a musical enthusiast, Hoffmann refrains from formulating a specific ideal of female song or providing us with an archetypal singer figure. A look through his diary reveals his enthusiasm for and appreciation of outstanding vocal performance, and the exaltation he experienced listening to his voice student Julia Mark.<sup>12</sup>

Hoffmann's singers cover a wide range of song types, from those of the voice student and dilettante or the accomplished prima donna to the ethereal, idealized 'song of nature'. While the majority of song types and situations accord with contemporary musical culture, Hoffmann's objective is nevertheless to discuss music and song within the broad frame of his own aesthetics, which contradicts the traditionally held assumption that his treatment of song is simplistic and misogynistic.<sup>13</sup> The author's pronounced affinity for experimenting with this specific human instrument as part of his aesthetics of completeness and abolition of binary codes may prompt us to look differently at his treatment of song and of the female singer in his œuvre as a whole.

Hoffmann was no theorist in the sense of creating a proper manifesto or educational treatise, but he conceptualized music in his literary writings. Of all his contemporaries,

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<sup>11</sup> Harmut Steinecke does not take the traditional dichotomy of male artist and female muse (as object) for granted, but questions the use of this motif in Hoffmann's writing: 'Die Liebe des Künstlers. Männer-Phantasien und Frauen-Bilder bei E. T. A. Hoffmann', in *Codierungen der Liebe in der Kunstperiode*, ed. Walter Hinderer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997): pp.293-309 (pp.303-308).

<sup>12</sup> See above all Hoffmann's diary for the years 1811 and 1812 (especially pp.110-75). His verdict of the singer Magdalena Koehl during his Bamberg years is highly acclamative (*TB*, pp.124;136).

<sup>13</sup> See n.7-10.



Hoffmann made perhaps the strongest case for cross-fertilization between music and literature, from which the central topoi and characters of his texts develop. If music plays an important part in many of his texts, two key sources are crucial for his understanding of music as a sublime, uncanny, and hence Romantic art form, namely his review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, which both form part of the *Kreisleriana*.

Die Musik schließt dem Menschen ein unbekanntes Reich auf; eine Welt, die nichts gemein hat mit der äußeren Sinnenwelt, die ihn umgibt, und in der er alle *bestimmten* Gefühle zurücklässt, um sich einer unaussprechlichen Sehnsucht hinzugeben.<sup>14</sup>

More than other writers of his time, the doubly gifted Hoffmann conjured up the *Geisterwelt*, a 'künstliche Gegensphäre zur Wirklichkeit'<sup>15</sup> that music represented to him, finding highly evocative words for the otherness and the ineffable sublime of music which a work like Beethoven's Fifth is able to create in the listener. In this context, Hoffmann used the term *romantisch* liberally in order to describe the quality of music and its ability to express the demoniac, the ineffable of the infinite. Like the authors discussed in the previous chapters and in the context of the musical-literary discourse, Hoffmann considered music the sublime, yet a sublime which was likely to frighten and unnerve the listener who felt his deepest, ineffable yet most urgent longing expressed through the medium of music. This understanding forms the core of Hoffmann's aesthetics of *Entgrenzung*, which holds both a positive and a disturbing potential. While music is able to abolish the boundaries of prosaic everyday life and create a sense of global completeness in human existence, it also implies all the ambivalence of the unknown other, of what is not prosaic and hence, may intrude into everyday life and potentially subvert prosaic order, thus sharing a central trait with the concept of *fantastisch*. Music, it appears, both fascinates and terrorizes, but in a deeper,

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<sup>14</sup> *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Hartmut Steinecke/Wulf Segebrecht/Gerhard Allroggen et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985-2004, vol.2/1, p.52 (hereafter *SW*). This essay is based on two Beethoven reviews published in the *AMZ* (1810/1813), probably redrafted as a *Kreislerianum* during the first half of 1813 and published at the end of the year (*Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, 9.-11.12. 1813).

<sup>15</sup> Dobat, *Musik als romantische Illusion*, p.96.

more visceral and existentialist sense than the imagery of female musical ambivalence that I have explained in chapters 2 and 3.

Hoffmann was partial to dream science and greatly appreciated Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert's *Die Symbolik des Traumes*<sup>16</sup> which he studied closely, as he did Schelling's *Von der Weltseele*: 'Sobald nur unsere Betrachtung zur Idee der Natur als eines Ganzen sich emporhebt, verschwindet der Gegensatz zwischen Mechanismus und Organismus'.<sup>17</sup> To Hoffmann, the musical experience was analogous to the dream state; both, despite their uncanny nature, potentially provided *Ganzheit*, a transcendent completeness, abolishing the boundaries between mechanical and organic. This, as we shall see, plays a crucial role in Hoffmann's treatment of female song.

There can be no doubt about the fact that, despite his taste for instrumental music, Hoffmann was highly susceptible to the importance of the voice as the most human of all instruments, and that he consistently argued for the intimate, beneficial link between music and words, recognizing the potential of song to overcome the dichotomy of musical mechanics. Hoffmann's writings suggest that it was indeed opera and vocal music which stood at the core of his musical vision.

Ja, in jenem fernen Reiche, das uns oft in seltsamen Ahnungen umfängt, und aus dem wunderbare Stimmen zu uns herabtönen und alle die Laute wecken, die in der beengten Brust schliefen, und die, nun erwacht, wie in feurigen Strahlen freudig und froh heraufschießen, so dass wir der Seligkeit jenes Paradieses teilhaftig werden – da sind Dichter und Musiker die innigst verwandten Glieder einer Kirche: denn das Geheimnis des Wortes und des Tons ist ein und dasselbe, das ihnen die höchste Weihe erschlossen.<sup>18</sup>

In counterbalance to its irrational, ineffable essence, music needs poetry if it is to be accessible and if its sublime nature is to be grasped by an audience. Hoffmann makes this point clearly in this key text on opera, and on the sacred union between music and

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<sup>16</sup> Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, *Die Symbolik des Traumes* (Bamberg: Kunz, 1814).

<sup>17</sup> *Werke*, ed. Manfred Schröter, 6 vol. (München: Beck, 1927/1928), I, p.416.

<sup>18</sup> *SW* 4, p.103. This is the oldest prose piece of the *Serapionsbrüder*, published as *Der Dichter und der Componist* in the *AMZ*, vol.15, nos. 49/50 (8./15.12.1813). Hoffmann drafted this dialogue while composing his opera *Undine*.

words, *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, in which Ludwig and Ferdinand, composer and poet, converse about the relationship between music and poetry, sound and text, and above all, about what makes a true, sublime opera as the embodiment of Romantic art:

In der Oper soll die Einwirkung höherer Naturen auf uns sichtbarlich geschehen und so vor unsern Augen sich ein romantisches Sein erschließen, in dem auch die Sprache höher potenziert, oder vielmehr jenem fernen Reiche entnommen, d.h. Musik, Gesang ist, ja wo selbst Handlung und Situation in mächtigen Tönen und Klängen schwebend, uns gewaltiger angreift und hinreißt. Auf diese Art soll, wie ich vorhin behauptete, die Musik unmittelbar und notwendig aus der Dichtung entspringen.<sup>19</sup>

As a dichotomy, vocal and instrumental music symbolize to Hoffmann the longed-for *Entgrenzung* that he seeks in music and writing – yet while instrumental music never quite loses its connotations of the uncanny, fear-inspiring and artificial realm of otherness, vocal music may in fact communicate the ineffable to a listener.<sup>20</sup> Thus, poetry and music intertwine in an effort to express the music already resonating within the human being. Ideally, both arts profit from their collaboration, insofar as music becomes accessible and communicable through language which in turn is being ‘höher potenziert’ through the sublime of music.<sup>21</sup> Rather than creating a dichotomy, with its insoluble problem of expressing music through written language, Hoffmann aims at an experience of synaesthesia of the arts as well as a transcendence of human experience and feeling through combining the realms of reality, music and dream. In this aspect, Hoffmann is undoubtedly in tune with earlier concepts of the singing voice and the sublime nature of music. However, we now see the tension Hoffmann experiences in trying to express music in a prosaic context and give this otherness any kind of form. Through their cooperation and mutual inspiration, poet and musician are able to shape the uncanny of music and its emotive force through reason and structure, all the while pushing the boundaries of human experience within the narrative frame, with the ideal of abandoning boundaries altogether. Both music and dream serve to emphasize

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<sup>19</sup> *SW* 4, p.104.

<sup>20</sup> Hoffmann shows this in another *Kreislerianum*, *Ombra Adorata!*, where the singing voice acts as a soothing force from the other world, comforting the listener (*SW* 2/1, pp.41-45).

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 3, and pp.99ff.



Hoffmann's general dictum on the fundamental ambivalence, duplicity and irrationality of human existence. This ambivalence, juxtaposed with Hoffmann's ideal of *Entgrenzung* is epitomized through the leitmotival contrast between musical inspiration and poetry on the one hand, and musical mechanics on the other.<sup>22</sup> Much more than previous authors, it seems that Hoffmann regards the interdependence of music and words as an insoluble conflict, and the musical experience less as a source of divine transcendence than of despair for the human artist.

Hoffmann differs significantly from earlier exponents of musical aesthetics in his views on the ideals pertaining to music and, by extension, to femininity, since his aesthetics of *Entgrenzung* cannot hide the fact that his musicians and singers are for the most part tormented and broken characters, who hardly ever experience musical transcendence, let alone thrive on the enthusiasm and artistic fulfilment which is supposed to be contained in the musical idea. In his literary texts, Hoffmann makes use of the musical concept of dissonance in order to portray music as being contradictory in itself, as the idea of sound and its actual execution oppose each other – it is an artistic ideal defying all attempts to confine it within the frame of prosaic musical life.<sup>23</sup> Dissonance characterizes and structures the lives of numerous of Hoffmann's musical characters who are torn between their own musical ideals and the prosaic context in which music is actually executed. In this, Hoffmann pursues a rather practical approach grounded in his own life as a professional musician, by portraying music as a struggle, not as liberation. He transposes this to his literary writing, making dissonant musical structures the guiding principles of his works, implying combinations of voices and harmonies which are likely to fail or cause conflict. Very often, music as it is alluded to

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<sup>22</sup> Dobat opposes the traditional reading of a Romantic dichotomy between music as the transcendent absolute, and literature as the prosaic counterpart, from which the conflict between prose and poetry would stem. Music is first and foremost an aesthetic experience for Hoffmann, while through his writings he exposes the Romantic error of idealizing music as fiction's solution to revealing the sublime. Rather, music becomes a means for enduring and bearing reality (Dobat, *Musik als romantische Illusion*, pp.153-55).

<sup>23</sup> See Keil, 'Dissonanz und Verstimmung. E. T. A. Hoffmanns Beitrag zur Entstehung der musikalischen Romantik', *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Jahrbuch*, 1 (1992-93), 119-33 (pp. 123ff.); Barbara di Noi, 'Romantische Allegorie und E. T. A. Hoffmanns höhere musikalische Mechanik', in 'Seelenaccente' - 'Ohrenphysiognomik'. *Zur Musikanschauung E. T. A. Hoffmanns, Heinses und Wackenroders*, ed. Werner Keil/Charis Goer (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000), pp.102-40.

in his texts collides with music as it finally structures the text and as it is being executed within the text. This applies to some characters as individuals in whom different voices are in conflict, but it applies even more to Hoffmann's characters in their relationships towards each other, as opposing musical entities, or as different musical registers, like voice and instrument.

Thus, Hoffmann's musical novellas often expose fundamental musical conflicts, which range from almost funny, banal scenes like the amateur musical soirée which Kreisler is forced to accompany, and in which neither notes nor harmonies are correct,<sup>24</sup> to existential conflicts between dissonant voices or artistic views, with potentially fatal consequences.<sup>25</sup>

The fragile, conflictual balance that emerges from Hoffmann's musical aesthetics, between the surreal, irrational, limitless side of music and its mechanical realities, its textual embodiment, makes for a highly intriguing reading of Hoffmann's singers in his musical narratives, and of the conflicts they face when trying to reconcile ideals of music and femininity with their own quests for performance and agency.

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<sup>24</sup> *Johannes Kreislers, des Kapellmeisters, musikalische Leiden*. This *Kreislerianum* is one of the few comic turns on the conflict between Kreisler, the absolute musician and the dilettante bourgeoisie he is forced to endure, probably due to financial constrictions (which certainly echoes Hoffmann's own experiences to a certain extent): 'O Satan, Satan! Welcher deiner höllischen Geister ist in diese Kehle gefahren, der alle Töne zwickt und zwingt und zerrt. Vier Saiten sind schon gesprungen, ein Hammer ist invalid. Meine Ohren gellen, mein Kopf dröhnt, meine Nerven zittern. Sind denn alle unreine Töne kreischender Marktschreier-Trompeten in diesen kleinen Hals gebannt'? (*Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, SW 2/1, p.37).

<sup>25</sup> As for example in the novellas *Rat Krespel* and *Das Sanctus*.



## Hoffmann's Singers

When talking about song, we can see again how Hoffmann, although drawing on existing musical aesthetics, ultimately departs from the central concept of song as the reliable mediator between music and language, between that inexpressible 'Geisterreich' and its resonance within the human being.

Der Dichter rüste sich zum kühnen Fluge in das ferne Reich der Romantik; dort findet er das Wundervolle, das er in das Leben tragen soll, lebendig und in frischen Farben erglänzend, so dass man willig daran glaubt, ja dass man, wie in einem beseligendem Traume, selbst dem dürftigen, alltäglichen Leben entrückt in den Blumengängen des romantischen Landes wandelt, und nur seine Sprache, das in Musik ertönende Wort versteht.<sup>26</sup>

At first glance, it seems that Hoffmann conforms to traditional ideals associated with song: the singer is the one who may be able to speak the language of the unknown romantic *Geisterreich*, and whose voice becomes in turn a *Geisterstimme*, like that of the singer in *Ombra adorata!* who takes the listener into the realm of music and leaves him with the memory of her voice as eternal consolation within his soul.<sup>27</sup> The singer adds form and content to a music which is already vaguely present within the listener's imagery ('in der Brust des Menschen selbst'): 'In dem Gesange, wo die Poesie bestimmte Affekte durch Worte andeutet, wirkt die magische Kraft der Musik wie das wunderbare Elixir der Weisen'.<sup>28</sup> Following Hoffmann's thoughts about music, a mythical understanding of song must, at some point, collide with the mechanics of actual music, with the *technical* realization of sound emitted by the human body: 'Der

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<sup>26</sup> *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, SW 4, p.103. In his diary, Hoffmann regularly alludes to the strangeness of the exaltation he experiences through song. Quite tellingly, he feels both liberation and terror in his passion for Julia, his voice student: 'Spukereien durch die musikalische Exaltation. Gesang!' (26.02.1812, TB, p.143)

<sup>27</sup> This short story was conceived at the height of Hoffmann's Julia crisis and alludes to the soothing, liberating power of the female voice, which Hoffmann will later perfect through the traits of Julia, Kreisler's love interest in *Kater Murr*.

<sup>28</sup> SW 2/1, p.52.



Ton wohnt überall, die Töne, das heißt die Melodien, welche die höhere Sprache des Geisterreiches reden, ruhen nur in der Brust des Menschen'.<sup>29</sup>

How should such a song, a transcription of something greater than oneself, be conceived within the singer, unless it is utter musical dilettantism or its opposite, a surreal, supreme genius that challenges physical and artistic boundaries? Especially since Hoffmann, as in his Beethoven discussion, does not always distinguish clearly between music and voice, so that music may be given vocal qualities just as the singer's voice merges with the music she aims to transpose? In *Ombra Adorata!*, the narrator closes his eyes before he even hears the singer, and he is thus able to perceive the song as a divine sound coming out of nowhere, or at least as a song which he cannot attribute to a distinct artistic subject. It is due to this immaterialism of the human voice that the narrator is able to conserve and stylise the song as a sound generated both by a sublime singer and within his own soul.<sup>30</sup> One may assume that, if Hoffmann perceives the discrepancy between ideal sound and musical mechanics as irreconcilable, this problem must be even more obvious in the case of a singer, for whom sound is naturally bound to the human body, yet who nevertheless is a central aspect of Hoffmann's overall musical aesthetics, aimed to push the boundaries of musical experience, and catalyse the ambivalence and inner torments of human existence through the musical experience. Thus, more than other authors before him, Hoffmann dramatizes very strongly the 'impossibility' associated with song and the fundamental paradox between the song ideal and its performance, which receives a special focus through the woman singer's conflict.

Hoffmann's song aesthetics are not particularly gender-specific but apply to both male and female voices as the author deals with the human voice and song in general, within the broad strokes of his musical ideals. Yet what makes Hoffmann's treatment of female song striking is the dichotomy of musical ideal and performance, more precisely

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<sup>29</sup> *Johannes Kreislers Lehrbrief*, SW 2/1, p.453. In reminiscence of Wilhelm Meister's *Lehrbrief*, Hoffmann redrafted an earlier essay entitled *Ahnungen aus dem Reich der Töne* (*Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, 21./22.02.1816) into a letter of mastership that Johannes Kreisler addresses to himself, concluding thus the *Kreisleriana* and the *Fantasiestücke*.

<sup>30</sup> 'dann wird in *deinen* Tönen mir eine tröstende Geisterstimme zulispeln' (Hoffmann's emphasis. *Ombra Adorata!* SW 2/1, p.45).

the conflict between musical experience as limitless and *entgrenzt*, as opposed to enclosed in the prosaic frame of musical practice and the dissonance that threatens to sabotage the musical ideal.

## Musical Mechanics and the Human Instrument: *Rat Krespel*

Stereotypical readings of Hoffmann's singers gained momentum through the Julia episode, amply illustrated in Hoffmann's diary and taken as a classical case of Romantic *Künstlerliebe*. Torn between the prosaic and the poetic, as Hoffmann liked to stress, he idealized Julia in art, transposing her and his ideal love into characters like Donna Anna, the epitome of the disembodied female voice.<sup>31</sup> But Hoffmann's singers offer more. Another central Hoffmann text that exposes a challenging singer is the novella *Rat Krespel*.

### Synopsis

*The narrator, Theodor, relates the story of councillor Krespel, a Hoffmannesque lawyer and musician who appears as both an amiable musical entertainer and a maniacal violin constructor who cuts open the instruments in order to reveal the secret of their sound, only to throw them away afterwards, in a Sisyphus-like dilemma of never reaching his goal. He lives a secluded existence with his daughter Antonie, the child of a 'dissonant' marriage with the Italian opera diva Angela, a capricious devil whose behaviour at the time drove Krespel away. Antonie, who possesses the most beautiful, unearthly voice, falls in love with the young composer B. However, Krespel forbids all contact since Antonie is diagnosed with a life-threatening chest condition that will lead to her death should she continue to sing. One night, Krespel dreams of Antonie's and B's musical love duet, only to wake and find his daughter dead, with an angelic smile on her face.*

Hoffmann's use of the voice in general, and his treatment of the female singer's voice in particular, merit special consideration in this iconic novella. While Krespel, whose own voice appears strangely out of tune with whatever he says, seems to be just as capricious as his former wife, he is a doting father to his angelic daughter Antonie, who surpasses her mother as a singer and is bound for a promising career.<sup>32</sup> In fact, when she sings, Antonie displays the highest qualities of sound production and poetry

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<sup>31</sup> Donna Anna in *Don Juan* (SW 2/1) as well as Lauretta and Teresina, the two singers in *Die Fermate*, (SW 4), have become representatives of specifically female disembodied singers whose song is appropriated by a male subject.

<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly, Antonie's name, through its playing with androgyny as well as with 'tone', implies a certain musical idealism.



and literally is able to embody the ideal of the musical sublime and transcendence and make this ideal graspable for her audience:

Der Rat vergoß Ströme von Tränen, nie hatte er selbst Angela so singen hören. Der Klang von Antoniens Stimme war ganz eigentümlich und seltsam oft dem Hauch der Äolsharfe, oft dem Schmettern der Nachtigall gleichend. Die Töne schienen nicht Raum haben zu können in der menschlichen Brust. Antonie vor Freude und Liebe glühend, sang und sang alle ihre schönsten Lieder und B. spielte dazwischen, wie es nur die wonnetrunkene Begeisterung vermag. Krespel schwamm erst in Entzücken, dann wurde er nachdenklich – still – in sich gekehrt. Endlich sprang er auf, drückte Antonien an seine Brust, und bat sehr leise und dumpf: ‘Nicht mehr singen, wenn du mich liebst – es drückt mir das Herz ab – die Angst – die Angst – nicht mehr singen’.<sup>33</sup>

Antonie’s voice is ideal sound, generated in the human body yet transcending pure physicality and surpassing the mechanics of singing. It is her voice but also that of *Naturmusik*, of the Aeolian harp and the nightingale. The voice’s otherworldliness at first moves then worries Krespel, whose concerns are confirmed by the doctor’s report according to which Antonie suffers from an incurable ‘flaw’ in her chest, which can be read both realistically, as a medical problem, and poetically, as the conflict between the ideal sound and the performing body, the Hoffmannesque problem of musical mechanics. Contrary to the singer in *Ombra Adorata!*, Antonie is no ethereal vision who is symbolically disembodied by the listener who closes his eyes, but is fully present and visible to her father and her fiancé, in her ‘impossible’ performance.

Krespel could be misunderstood at this point, as a jealous father who wants to keep his daughter for himself and away from her composer fiancé, thus cementing female song stereotypes. Yet first and foremost Krespel acknowledges the ideal of music embodied in his daughter, whose ‘flaw’ is exactly what creates the inhuman, surreal sound. Antonie, whether consciously or not, embodies the musical genius of artistic *Entgrenzung*, both the creative originality and the ‘extra something’ which mark her as supreme, and which are hinted at through her pathological physicality and the quality of

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<sup>33</sup> *SW* 4, p.60. The novella was first published as a postscript to Fouqué (‘Ein Brief von Hoffmann an Herrn Baron de la Motte Fouqué’, *Frauentaschenbuch für das Jahr 1818*). See n.41. *Rat Krespel* went from a relatively unknown novella to an archetypal piece of Hoffmann’s writing that also inspired parts of Offenbach’s opera.

her voice. Yet it is an unliveable ideal surpassing the capacities of body and mind. Krespel, who tries in vain to cut open violins and decipher their mysteries, knows this and therefore, as an eccentric yet loving father, he tries to keep his daughter from forcing this ideal, even if it means compromising her artistic agency, intimately linked to her love for B to whom she is bound through art. To Antonie, singing equals living her love for her fiancé, whilst the father's interdiction to sing means renouncing the union with the musician and living a compromise with Krespel's violins, which Antonie eventually resigns herself to for a while.

Kaum hatte [Krespel] die ersten Töne angestrichen, als Antonie laut und freudig rief: 'Ach das bin ich ja – ich singe ja wieder'. Wirklich hatten die silberhellen Glockentöne des Instruments etwas ganz Eigenes Wundervolles, sie schienen in der menschlichen Brust erzeugt. Krespel wurde bis in das Innerste gerührt, er spielte wohl herrlicher als jemals, und wenn er in kühnen Gängen mit voller Kraft, mit tiefem Ausdruck auf- und niederstieg, dann schlug Antonie die Hände zusammen, und rief entzückt: 'Ach das habe ich gut gemacht! Das habe ich gut gemacht'!<sup>34</sup>

However health-preserving and soothing the synaesthetic compromise of the instrument-voice may be, it does not provide Antonie with the true vocation for her life as the artist she is and furthermore alienates the singer from her voice by employing a substitute voice in the shape of the violin. Although this disembodiment of the female voice portrayed by Hoffmann could be read as a conscious effort to disempower the singer and make her her father's mouthpiece, depriving her of her artistic self-expression, this brief interlude actually serves to strengthen the singer's agenda, which is made clear quite poetically by Hoffmann in the novella's conclusion, when Krespel 'dreams' of Antonie's and B's reunion in music:

Nun fiel Antonie ein in leisen hingehauchten Tönen, die immer steigend und steigend zum schmetternden Fortissimo wurden, dann gestalteten sich die wunderbaren Laute zu dem tief ergreifenden Liede, welches B... ganz im frommen Styl der alten Meister für Antonie komponiert hatte. [...] Plötzlich umgab [Krespel] eine blendende Klarheit, und in derselben erblickte er B... und Antonien, die sich umschlungen hielten und sich voll

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

seligem Entzücken anschauen. Die Töne des Liedes und des begleitenden Pianofortes dauerten fort, ohne dass Antonie sichtbar sang oder B... das Fortepiano berührte.<sup>35</sup>

Whether Antonie's premature death may tap into contemporary ideologies of unhealthy song or the inhuman ideal of sublime music, it is striking to see that the reading of this disembodied girl mistreated by her father has often been simplified within a binary pattern of male power and female death.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, Krespel is actually far from being a jealous, possessive character, just as his daughter is more than a singer who pays for her transgression with her death. Antonie's death is in no way a constructive element for the male artist's creative process. Krespel's first plea for her to stop singing is inspired by worry, and the tearful realization that this unearthly song cannot (and therefore must not) exist. In consequence, keeping Antonie from a selfish, demanding crowd must to a certain extent be regarded as an act of respect towards the true artist: 'Auch die Welt, das musikalische Publikum, mocht' es auch unterrichtet sein von Antoniens Leiden, gab gewiß die Ansprüche nicht auf, denn dies Volk ist ja, kommt es auf Genuß an, egoistisch und grausam'.<sup>37</sup> The fact that Krespel keeps Antonie for himself does not imply a wish to monopolize her song exclusively – on the contrary, not hearing her sing pains him, while the self-imposed silence fuels Antonie's determination to live and sing with her fiancé. At no point does Krespel keep Antonie against her will, but rather he lets her choose her own path in life.<sup>38</sup> In terms of the often-cited violin motif, Krespel does not gain any profit from disembodiment of Antonie's voice. Krespel merely executes his daughter's substitute voice on the violin, yet he does not understand this type of sound – it is Antonie who identifies with the violin, not her father – nor can he uphold or decipher this type of *Sphärenmusik*. Antonie's violin-voice, spared from Krespel's dissection, 'breaks' upon her death and is consequently buried with her. The musical mechanic (and dilettante) Krespel remains behind as his daughter, the enigma of the true artist, dissolves: 'Sie ist dahin und das

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.63/64.

<sup>36</sup> See n.7-10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61. This remark, which could be Kreisler's, again emphasizes the fragility and uniqueness of the true artist amidst prosaic surroundings.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61. It is rather the narrator's perception of Krespel and his romanticized image of Antonie whom he claims should be 'liberated' from her father's tyranny.



Geheimnis gelöst!’<sup>39</sup> Rather than implying a solution to the enigma of Antonie’s song (and hence to art itself), Krespel here realizes that Antonie took her secret to the grave. He feels liberated from the musical burden, abandoning all art forever.

Antonie is a fascinating enactment of Hoffmann’s ideal of *Entgrenzung* and of liberation through the musical experience, through a voice belonging to the singer yet transcending the mechanics of the human body.<sup>40</sup> Antonie’s death scene is situated within a dream state, in which boundaries dissolve and the artist ends her life happily. The singer and her voice transcend boundaries of dream, imagination and reality from the very beginning, a fact further implied by the character’s genesis, which started with the thought of sound.<sup>41</sup>

Struggling with his own poetic creativity, the author experiments with these two sides of sound by creating a female singer from his own chest and by attributing the conflicting sides of her ethereal voice to a pathologic condition in her own chest. Throughout the story, he toys with the dream-like quality and elusiveness of the singer’s voice: the narrator, Theodor, actually never hears Antonie sing a single note, yet he fantasizes about the beauty of her voice and visualizes her song in his imagination – an analogous state to Krespel who literally sees his daughter off in a dream. Song thus remains an unreachable fantasy.

However, *Rat Krespel* may also be regarded as a novella with a strong statement about art, albeit an art that leads to death. The true artist Antonie, knowing about the fatal nature of absolute art, chooses the brief life as an artist, in song and love with her fiancé. Her death, couched in imagery of transcendence and bliss, implies self-

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>40</sup> For a different turn on the motif of musical *Entgrenzung*, see Werner Keil, ‘The Voice from the Hereafter: E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Ideal of Sound and its Realization in Early Twentieth-Century Electronic Music’, in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism*, pp.143-61.

<sup>41</sup> ‘mochte es sein, daß der [...] Abendwind über den offen stehenden Flügel hineingestreift, oder daß ein flatternder Sommervogel die Saiten berührt hatte – genug, ein klarer Ton, wie aus weiblicher Brust hervorgehaucht, ging lang und leise verhallend durch das Zimmer [...], und da war mir, als sei es die Stimme einer mir wohlbekannten Sängerin, die zu meinem Geist spräche, und doch wusst ich nicht, hatt ich sie einst wirklich oder nur im Traum gehört. [...] Sodann seufzte ich aus tiefer Brust: Antonie!’ (*SW* 4, pp.1272/73) In this apologetic letter to Fouqué, who had requested a new story for his *Frauentaschenbuch für das Jahr 1817*, which Hoffmann, due to his many activities, had failed to produce, the author explains as a postscript how he came across the ‘freundliche Himmelsgestalt’ Antonie and attributed the name to a specific feeling of sound.

determination and no sense of regret. Thus, while traditional scholarship reads Antonie's fate as a stereotypical female death catalysed by male manipulation, the deeper meaning implied in the novella is that Hoffmann sees the solution to artistic transcendence and *Entgrenzung* in the annihilation of physicality and the passing over into a preternatural state, which is best expressed through the metaphor of dream. Furthermore, Hoffmann takes a stance on traditional constellations of idealized femininity and male fantasies, as opposed to the autonomy of the woman artist.<sup>42</sup>

### Glimpses of Emancipation? *Das Sanctus*

#### Synopsis

*Bettina, an acclaimed and popular singer has lost her voice after leaving church prematurely during the Sanctus and having been reprimanded for this by a nun. As the doctor can find no physical reason for her condition, a travelling enthusiast tells the story of a Moorish girl, Zulema, during the Reconquista of Grenada.<sup>43</sup> Zulema, an outstanding singer, accepts Christianity and, under the name of Julia, performs with the nuns in church. However, her 'old' character resurfaces and she leaves the choir to perform her old, heathenish tunes. During a mass baptism, she eventually resurfaces and leads the congregation in to church, only to die in front of the altar. The story concludes with Bettina, who has eavesdropped on the story, regaining her voice.*

Just as enigmatic and multi-layered as *Rat Krespel*, *Das Sanctus*, which concludes the first part of Hoffmann's *Nachtstücke*, portrays two very different singers, intertwined through their fates as well as through narrative structure.

This time the singer's vocal flaw is more clearly psychological, and Bettina eventually recovers completely and is able to resume her profession. The story garnered considerable critical interest through psychoanalytical readings relating to the singer's mysterious aphony, and the power struggles between the singing voice and a patriarchal

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<sup>42</sup> See also Margarete Kohlenbach, 'Women and Artists: E. T. A. Hoffmann's Implicit Critique of Early Romanticism', *MLR*, 89.3 (July 1994), pp.659-673.

<sup>43</sup> *Das Sanctus*, SW 5. Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian's *Gonzalve de Cordoue ou Grenade reconquise* (1791) probably inspired the central story; for the narrative frame of Bettina's illness, Hoffmann may have used the personal anecdote of a singer who had temporarily lost her voice.

system symbolized by the church. What seems however to be at the centre of Hoffmann's preoccupation in this entirely musical novella is the artistic dilemma of a singer who has lost the most important tool of self-expression and creativity. The story of the singer Zulema, who becomes entangled within the conflicting voices of Christendom and Islam, serves to cure Bettina of her neurosis, restoring her confidence as an artist and enabling her to continue her career. Zulema is a fascinating character, as Hoffmann crafts her as a strong yet dissonant artist for whom death is the only solution to a perceived double-bind: singing her traditional, heathenish tunes, Zulema, 'das Licht des Gesanges in Granada',<sup>44</sup> challenges and opposes Christian culture (expressed through the Catholic liturgy) which at the time is regaining control over Andalusia. Zulema is neither forced to convert to Christianity nor to sing church music, yet gradually, she attunes her lyre and voice to the strange sounds, eventually joining in with the nuns' choir. However, as 'Julia', she never fits in; her voice constantly overshadows the choral ensemble, and eventually strays again towards her traditional songs.

Oft hallte plötzlich der dumpfe Klang einer tiefgestimmten Zither durch den Chor. Der Ton glich dem Nachklingen vom Sturm durchrauschter Saiten. Dann wurde Julia unruhig und es geschah sogar, dass sie willkürlos in den lateinischen Hymnus ein mohrisches Wort einwarf.<sup>45</sup>

Caught between two opposing musical as well as cultural ideals, Zulema appears dissonant and subversive towards her surroundings, but most importantly, she compromises her own integrity while trying to adapt to Christian music under the mask of Julia. Her constant oscillation between two antagonistic songs, her subsequent experimenting with the boundaries of different musical patterns, seems only to resolve itself in her physical death, which ensues after she sings the liturgy during a mass-conversion. This last step of the singer's conflict implies her transcendence beyond physical boundaries, symbolized by her unearthly voice and her upward gaze.<sup>46</sup> In this

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.



aspect, she shares an important trait with Antonie, in that both characters embody a profound conflict between a specific musical ideal and the constraints and contradictions of the performing body (and thus, of the ‘musical mechanic’). Moreover, in the light of Hoffmann’s aesthetics, Zulema’s fate may be read as that of the artist who, compromising her integrity tries, to conform to ideals that are not her own, tearing herself to pieces over an irreconcilable dichotomy. Perhaps Zulema betrays her own musicianship by switching sides and singing church music, perhaps she is just toying with a different way of expressing herself –whatever it may be, the context of an instrumentalized Christian faith which is used as a means of power and oppression perhaps overshadows the more fundamental challenge of the artist to stay genuine. Zulema dies because there is ultimately no way for her to express her authentic song, nor is her body able to contain music which contradicts her ideals.

As for Bettina, Zulema’s story helps her recover from aphony, since she understands the story’s key issues. She is able to transpose Zulema’s fate to her own, turning the girl’s conflict into a resolution for her own dilemma. At the end of the story, Bettina sings Pergolesi’s *Stabat mater*, but she performs it in a medium-sized recital room (‘jedoch nicht in der Kirche, sondern im mäßig großen Zimmer’<sup>47</sup>), not in church. This last, somewhat enigmatic scene may imply that the busy diva Bettina has adopted a calmer schedule, and thus matured to a truer form of musicianship. But more importantly, the scene implies a dissolution of traditional music patterns, liberating music from a specific frame, like the church, and turning it into a universal piece of art to be performed anywhere.<sup>48</sup> Bettina’s performance thus represents another form of musical *Entgrenzung* and artistic self-determination in the Hoffmannesque sense, but with the positive implication of the woman singer’s reclaiming her artistic agency and liberating herself from performance constraints.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

<sup>48</sup> Not coincidentally, Bettina’s voice in this last scene is described as a ‘herrliche Glocken-Stimme’ (p.160), which plays with the image of the church bells.

## Male Phantasms? Kreisler and Julia

A surprisingly strong case of female musicianship, though not often regarded as such, is Julia, Johannes Kreisler's music student and idealized, platonic love object. The Kapellmeister and mad musician Kreisler, a veritable predecessor of both Balzac's Gambara and Hector Berlioz's Corsino, is a very early figure in Hoffmann's oeuvre. He makes his first appearance in the satirical piece *Johannes Kreislers, des Kapellmeisters musikalische Leiden*,<sup>49</sup> and finds his most accomplished expression in the late novel *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*. Although it is certainly possible to read her as yet another female object of the male artist's desire, Julia is not a passive musician at all, especially if we take into account Hoffmann's musical ideals. Julia is the only character to actually claim musicianship for herself and put it into practice, without the dissonance we usually perceive in Hoffmann's characters. She first meets Kreisler during a walk with her friend, Princess Hedwiga. The two girls accidentally eavesdrop on Kreisler, attracted by his singing and guitar playing. However, as he cannot seem to master the tuning of the instrument and produce harmonic accompaniments to his voice, Kreisler throws the guitar away in frustration. Inspired by his music, Julia takes up the guitar and starts singing her own songs which, unlike the Kapellmeister's attempts, resonate in perfect harmony, creating a transcendent sound.

Julia konnte es nicht unterlassen, sie schlug einen Akkord auf dem zierlichen Instrument an und erschrak beinahe über den mächtigen vollen Klang, der aus dem kleinen Dinge heraustönte. 'O herrlich – herrlich', rief sie aus und spielte weiter. Da sie aber gewohnt, nur ihren Gesang mit der Gitarre zu begleiten, so konnte es nicht fehlen, daß sie bald unwillkürlich zu singen begann, indem sie weiter fortwandelte. [...] Sie begann eine bekannte italienische Kanzonetta und verlor sich in allerlei zierliche Melismen, gewagte Läufe und Capriccios, Raum gebend dem vollen Reichtum der Töne, der in ihrer Brust ruhte.<sup>50</sup>

Julia, untrained and (yet) 'unspoiled' by a harmful society, manages to do 'naturally' what Kreisler, the professional musician, fails to do: attune her voice to the

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<sup>49</sup> See n.24.

<sup>50</sup> *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern*, SW 5, p.64.

sound of the guitar and project the resulting music to the outside - or rather, she does not need to attune anything as she possesses music intrinsically since traditional patterns of musicianship do not apply to her. It is characteristic to see that while Hedwiga experiences genuine fear of Kreisler, who appears as the embodiment of music's demonic forces, Julia remains unimpressed, using the music that Kreisler inspired in her to translate into her own soothing, communicable musical language.

Here, Hoffmann draws on well-established images of female song, such as the 'natural' link between woman and music and the embodiment of the musical (and feminine) ideal through Julia. Yet although one may qualify her as a symbolic *Genius* figure to Kreisler,<sup>51</sup> Julia in fact puts into practice the Hoffmannesque ideal of consolation and catharsis through music as the soothing of a prosaic environment through the musical experience. Unlike most singers who are spied upon by a male onlooker/listener and whose voice may be appropriated by a male subject, Julia in fact eavesdrops on Kreisler and, literally, takes over from him as a musician. Throughout the novel, Julia is depicted as being able to use her singing as a means of liberation and escape. Contrary to Kreisler, whose compositions she sings and plays, Julia is a pragmatic musician who executes music 'naturally' without doubting her own capacities or conceptualizing any views on music as such.

'O Johannes, sprach sie sanft, du guter, herrlicher Mann, kann ich denn nicht bei dir den Schutz suchen, den du mir versprochen? Kannst du nicht selbst zu mir tröstend reden mit den Himmelstönen, die recht widerhallen in meiner Brust'? – Damit öffnete Julia das Pianoforte und begann die Kompositionen Kreislers, die ihr die liebsten waren, zu spielen und zu singen. In der Tat fühlte sie sich bald getröstet, erheitert, der Gesang trug sie fort in eine andere Welt, es gab keinen Prinzen, ja keine Hedwiga mehr, deren krankhafte Phantome sie verstören durften! [...] Julia hatte geendet, in das Andenken an Kreisler ganz und gar versunken, schlug sie noch einzelne Akkorde an, die ein Echo schienen ihrer innern Gefühle.<sup>52</sup>

Among the tormented musicians of Hoffmann's universe, Julia is a strikingly positive character, affirmative of and attuned to the sublimity of music and one of the few examples in whom song and music do not appear dissonant. While Hoffmann

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<sup>51</sup> The analogy with Hoffmann's personal Julia episode is hard to ignore in this case.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.345/346.



identifies with the plight of the male musical genius to some extent, he also leaves no doubt about the futility of Kreisler's ideals, warning above all against the Romantic illusion that music reveals the sublime. It seems in this case that Hoffmann makes a case for music as a consolation for and a solution to the struggles of everyday life. Julia is able to realize this in practice. However, since the novel remained unfinished, it leaves the question of the potential of female musicianship ultimately unanswered. As in the case of *Rat Krespel*, one needs to read between the lines and question the seemingly pre-established power hierarchies between male and female musicians to detect Hoffmann's nuances in his treatment of music as an area of dispute between ideal and reality.

In conclusion, although Hoffmann was certainly a man of his time and did not argue the case for women artists like Caroline Auguste Fischer, it has become clear that to discuss his texts in similarly binary, restrictive terms is counterproductive and does not do justice to the author's complex view of either male or female musicians, and of what he perceived to be a multiplicity of existences and experiences.<sup>53</sup> Hoffmann's treatment of the female singer and her song appears much less as a simplistic take on ideal femininity than as a multi-layered exploration of female expression through song, and as a general interrogation of the conflict between musical ideals and mechanics, especially in relation to the artist's own freedom vis-à-vis the constraints put upon music in the prosaic world. Hoffmann's aesthetic roots are to be found in the Romantic ideals of music and art, yet at the same time, he appears disillusioned with them, a fact which is illustrated in his texts through the juxtaposition of musical ideals and fantasies, and the realities of the *artist*. This important mirroring and cross-referencing between ideal, illusion and reality is already present in the previous case studies, even more so as they are so fundamental to the question of the woman singer. But Hoffmann takes this polemic further than Goethe, Staël and Fischer, through his radical treatment of body and song performance, musical ideals and their prosaic performance space.

In conclusion, we can detect aspects of criticism towards contemporary ideals relating to art and women which show us that, in his scepticism, Hoffmann was also

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<sup>53</sup> See Hoffmann's remark on the 'Vervielfältigungsglas' of the self, p.159.

formulating his own artistic ideals beyond binary models such as male composer and female singer. His ultimate experiment concerned the completeness of human existence in and through art, all the while remaining sensitive towards notions of dissonance and inner contradiction. Often enough, Hoffmann's singers are not what they seem to be, or what their male listeners and onlookers would like them to be, and thus they undermine the ideal of musical femininity as well as the fantasy of song as a spectacle for the audience. Symbols of artistic integrity and autonomy, Hoffmann's singers seem to struggle more genuinely for true musicianship and a space within which they can express themselves as artists, or at least, where they can sensibly realize a form of artistry for themselves amidst an unbearable environment – much like Hoffmann himself.

## (2) From Periphery to Centre: France and the Artist as Centre Stage

Qu'est-ce qu'un chanteur? Un seul corps qui doit donner des âmes à ceux qui n'en ont pas.<sup>54</sup>

The exceptionally broad and diverse musical culture of mid-century France was briefly summarized in chapter 2. Here, I shall discuss in more detail how the musical-literary discourse on singer and song specifically transferred into French prose-fiction of the 1830s and 40s. As we shall see, this transition from Germany to France developed as a rewriting of paradigms inherited from early Romanticism and authors like Goethe, Staël and Hoffmann and a strong response to the latter's fantastical musical novellas, but also as a gradual departure from earlier models of female song towards more assertive and realistic visions of the woman singer.

### The Trivia of Genius: the Literary Output of the Singer

Perhaps more so than in Germany, musical enthusiasm in France appears as a frenzied mass vogue and true socio-cultural and literary *ferment*<sup>55</sup> which, in addition to its preoccupation with musical genius and artistic emancipation, contained a pronounced social agenda and sought to shape contemporary society. In this regard, French literature treating music between 1830 and 1848, as compared to earlier German texts, appears slightly to widen its reflection on song and the singer by placing the figure of the musician at the centre and, in doing so, raising the question of the artist in society. Underneath the social spectacle of music as mass-culture and the glorification of artistic attitudes, French texts of the mid-century, embracing tendencies of both Romantic and

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<sup>54</sup> Xavier Fomeret, *Un Crétin et sa harpe, Contes et récits*, ed. Jacques Rémi Dahan (Paris: Corti, 1994), p.197.

<sup>55</sup> See Tunley: *Music in the 19th-Century Parisian Salon*, p.7.



Realist aesthetics, presented the question of the singer and her status as woman and artist with renewed vigour.

The political, economic and socio-cultural caesura of 1830 also marked the start of a new type of musical-literary discourse and the way in which writers reflected on music within a broader discussion of the place and status of art and artists. Coinciding with the heyday of French romanticism and bridging the gap between early romanticism and modernism, the high literary output between 1830 and 1848 appears particularly attuned to the question of the artist, and specifically, to the topic of music.<sup>56</sup>

1830, the year of the *Bataille d'Hernani*, equally marked the start of Hoffmann's reception in France, giving rise to a number of emulations and re-writings of his musical and fantastical tales, albeit of varying quality.<sup>57</sup> Not all the *contes* were literary masterpieces but rather a constant feed into the *roman-feuilleton* vogue,<sup>58</sup> which, defined by form rather than content, served popular commonplaces like the Hoffmannesque and the glamour and eccentricities associated with the artist and musician milieu, including the archetype of the *prima donna*. If music literature of the 1830s and 40s appears popular, it was just as much a formula-based business, potentially short-lived and catering for the bourgeois' fascination with everything artistic and their desire to pose as artists themselves. In his article for the *Revue des deux Mondes*, Sainte-Beuve singles out the bourgeois *artistisme* and the *littérature industrielle* as characteristics of his time 'où la littérature et la société sont dans un tel pêle-mêle, et où la vie d'artiste et celle de l'homme du monde semblent perpétuellement s'échanger'.<sup>59</sup> Coined during the 1830s, the term of *musicien littéraire* categorizes both major names

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<sup>56</sup> See Bailbé, pp.11-23.

<sup>57</sup> For an extensive discussion of Hoffmann's enthusiastic reception in France see the standard work by Elizabeth Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France* (Geneva: Droz, 1961). More recent studies include Ute Klein, *Die produktive Rezeption E. T. A. Hoffmanns in Frankreich* (Bern: Lang, 2000); Andrea Hübener, *Kreisler in Frankreich: E. T. A. Hoffmann und die französischen Romantiker (Gautier, Nerval, Balzac, Delacroix, Berlioz)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> For studies of contemporary press culture, see Lise Queffélec, *Le Roman-feuilleton français au XIXe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1989); Patrick Berthier, *La Presse littéraire et dramatique au début de la Monarchie de Juillet (1830-1836)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1997).

<sup>59</sup> *RDM*, 15.09.1840. (cited in Martin-Fugier, *Les Romantiques: figures de l'artiste, 1820-1848* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 1998), p.229). Gautier takes a similarly cynical stance in his 'Excès d'artiste': 'L'épicier n'existe plus. C'est l'artiste qui l'a tué. [...] Quel déluge d'arts, d'artistes et de choses artistiques'! (*Le Figaro*, 25.4.1837).



like Sand and Berlioz and their less-gifted, mass-producing colleagues. A large number of women wrote as *musiciens littérateurs*, most of them educated and intimately acquainted with the musical culture of their time, as salon hostesses and dilettanti, and sometimes even as accomplished amateur singers and pianists. However, with the exception of George Sand and, to a lesser extent, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, the prolific women of musical literature are nowadays forgotten – just like a large number of their male colleagues.

Many novellas blend fact and fiction through frequent references to historical musicians. Dramatizing the life of early modern singer and composer Francesca Caccini, the singer-writer Stéphen de la Madeleine described her rise to fame in the fictitious account of her family's struggles and her own fear of becoming a professional singer on stage.<sup>60</sup> The critic Paul Scudo portrayed a similarly successful musician in his semi-factual *Histoire d'une cantatrice italienne*,<sup>61</sup> for which he blended real-life references to the Parisian music scene with the fictitious life-story of the enigmatic soprano Rosine Stoltz. Allusions to famous singers or musicians are common in many texts, satisfying the public's infatuation with the artists, yet also commenting on mass musical culture through their ridicule of megalomaniac dilettanti as opposed to the real divas – due to the iconic status of certain singers, such as Maria Malibran, Pauline Viardot, Rosine Stoltz, the simple reference to *La Malibran* in the narrative context provided important fleshing out with regard to credibility, talent and aesthetics of the fictitious singer.

Similarly to the German lieder tradition, the French *romance* was a fully-fledged, *feminized* business product and mass-vogue, associated with a female singer possessing a naturally beautiful voice and, echoing the Rousseauesque ideal, singing of unhappiness in love and of her longing for nature and harmony. *Romance* scenes of yearning lovers or young girls who express their innermost feelings and musical

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<sup>60</sup> 'Francesca', *RGM*, 4.5 (28.1.1837).

<sup>61</sup> *Critique et littérature musicales*, pp.376-90. A notorious musical theorist and critic for a number of journals like the *Revue de Paris* and the *Revue des deux mondes*, Scudo did not hold back with typically sexist reviews of singers, whose perceived lack of talent he considered to be tolerable in view of their physical attractiveness (see pp.33ff.). The historico-cultural context described in *Histoire* was inspired by Scudo's own apprenticeship at Choron's music academy in Paris.



femininity abound in contemporary texts, emphasizing the poetic and feminine connotations of song: 'C'est le cœur qui chante'.<sup>62</sup> While the *romance* came to be known as a particularly successful genre for women as well as an intersection of high and popular art, of poets and composers,<sup>63</sup> the *romance* singer in fiction continued to negotiate the poetic and the trivial aspects of contemporary musical culture, as exemplified by Balzac's 'natural' musician *Modeste Mignon* as well as the satirical case study of the 'Cantatrice de Salon'<sup>64</sup> or the numerous ironic texts dealing with dilettantism and the bourgeois' presumptuous artistic pose: 'Mademoiselle de Valgrand, musicienne comme le sont à peu près toutes les jeunes personnes élevées pour le monde'.<sup>65</sup> As in Balzac's case, authors did not necessarily accentuate the populist, trivial side of the singer, yet significantly elaborated on the complex nature and quality of song as part of the artist's profile and a sign of her uncorrupted artistic sublimity:<sup>66</sup> 'Cette fille était le type de poésie secrète, lien commun de tous les arts, et qui fuit toujours ceux qui la cherchent'.<sup>67</sup> In his *Filles du feu*, Gérard de Nerval combined reflections on the woman artist with narrative experiments on the common ground between song and poetic prose.<sup>68</sup> It comes as no surprise that both these authors greatly appreciated Goethe and German literary traditions. The writing of the singer as a sublime, artist of genius also embraced notions of spontaneous, 'natural' creativity, perhaps best symbolized by reminiscences of Corinne's gift of improvisation: 'Elle

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<sup>62</sup> Victor Fleury: *L'Artiste* 3 (1833), p.188. Fulcher ('The Popular Chanson', p.37) describes French song as the 'literature of the people as well as their spontaneous, abstract expression in song'.

<sup>63</sup> The fruitful collaboration of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore with the composer Pauline Duchambge is a pertinent example of the successful *romance*. See Léon Guichard, *La Musique et les lettres au temps du romantisme* (Paris: PUF, 1955), pp.42ff.

<sup>64</sup> Maurice de Flassan, 'La Cantatrice de Salon'. *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle*, II (Paris: Léon Curmer, 1839-1842), pp.201-208.

<sup>65</sup> Camille Bodin [Jenny Bastide], *Berthe et Louise*, cited in Bailbé, p.115. The cure of the megalomaniac dilettante proved to be highly popular: 'Eugénie Bernard est aujourd'hui Madame Renaud. C'est toujours une charmante femme. Elle n'a point cessé de cultiver la musique, mais seulement comme une utile distraction. Elle est la première à rire de ce qu'elle nomme assez plaisamment son échauffourée musicale' ('C.V', 'Le démon de la mélomanie', *LFM*, 11.2-4, 9.-23.1.1848).

<sup>66</sup> See Bailbé, p.119.

<sup>67</sup> *La Comédie humaine*, ed. Pierre-Georges Castex, 12 vol. (Paris: Gallimard Pléiade, 1976-1981), X, p.397 (hereafter *CH*).

<sup>68</sup> Before being integrated into *Les Filles du feu*, Nerval's music novella *Corilla*, about an enigmatic opera singer of the same name (reminiscent of both Corilla Olimpica and Corinne) was first published under the title 'Les Deux rendez-vous', *La Presse*, 15./17.8. 1839.



réunissait à la fois le génie qui crée, le talent qui exécute, la grâce qui embellit'.<sup>69</sup>

George Sand went a step further in her unlimited admiration of the artist Pauline Viardot, calling her 'la prêtresse de l'idéal en musique', who must preach true music to the world.<sup>70</sup>

The breadth and diversity of, but also the sometimes blatant qualitative discrepancies between different French romantic and realist texts treating the singer, pose a challenge for the critical assessment of the topic; since, as I have made explicit in chapters 2 and 3, the singer with her numerous incarnations as *actrice*, *cantatrice*,<sup>71</sup> *chanteuse des rues*, *harpiste*, *prima donna* or *diva assoluta* belongs to both the trivial and the elite, these incarnations appearing as prominent enactments of both 'high' and 'low' artistic discourse; furthermore she continues to negotiate the dichotomy of ideal femininity and female performance. She was used by authors who have subsequently achieved canonical status as well as in texts that have since faded from public memory.<sup>72</sup> The singer as a literary motif continues to cover a wide set of *topoi* related to both the musical feminine and the issues of the female performer's artistic empowerment.

The potentially stereotypical surface image of the July Monarchy singer covers deeper problems of the ideal of female song and its relationship with the female body: the way in which the singer may or may not express her song, or take her vocal gift further in a social and professional sense beyond the constraints of female musical ideal and practice which I outlined in chapters 2 and 3.

In addition to the problem of female musicality, the singer partakes in the contemporary debate on artists and their place in society: An iconic specimen of her time, the singer belongs to the highly popular group of both musicians and performers, which situates her in the coveted realm of artists and bohemians, in which middle-class culture expressed an almost frenzied interest. Although texts deal with other performing

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<sup>69</sup> Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Gosselin, 1835), cited in Bailbé, p.179.

<sup>70</sup> Sand, *Correspondance* V, p.705.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>72</sup> The example of Balzac's *Sarrasine* shows that a *conte musical* which received little attention during its time went on to canonization thanks to Roland Barthes' critical appraisal in *S/Z* (1970).

arts professions like that of the dancer or the actress, the singer appears as the woman artist of choice, both in the socio-cultural and the aesthetic sense of the term. She represents a new breed of performing artist in the public realm, yet even though she may come closest to the Romantic ideal of original, creative genius and its apotheosis through music and the musician, she nevertheless still faces the essential problems encountered by singers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mid-century texts that treat the topic of female song continue to address both poetics and performance. In line with the polemics surrounding female song at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the female performer remains *per definitionem* transgressive and subversive of the patriarchal order, often going too far in her claim for a distinct voice as a sign of agency which through her profession she expresses as life-fulfilling.

Moving away from Early Romanticism, the singer's poetic and aesthetic problem becomes increasingly bound up with the social implications of the professional artist's claiming agency. In short, the controversy surrounding the singer, as expressed through its narrative treatment, loses nothing of its sharpness, as French authors continue to negotiate different ideals of female song and their various incarnations through a woman performer in their texts. In the following, I will discuss this problem specifically in selected texts by Balzac and Berlioz, two authors in the wake of Hoffmann who developed very strong yet controversial views on the woman singer and her song.



## Hoffmann Legacies I: Honoré de Balzac *musicien-littérateur*

‘Croyez-vous que l’Allemagne ait seule le  
privilège d’être absurde et fantastique?’  
(Balzac, epigraph to the pre-original edition of  
*Sarrasine*)

Honoré de Balzac played a key role in introducing the German *fantastique* to a French audience,<sup>73</sup> and it comes as no surprise that Balzac published his first, and perhaps most enigmatic, music novella, *Sarrasine* (1830), at the height of the Hoffmann vogue in France.<sup>74</sup> Balzac’s interest in Hoffmann was not simply the expression of contemporary taste. In fact, he had already published a Hoffmann tale in his journal *Le Gymnase* in 1828,<sup>75</sup> when Loève-Veimars inaugurated the Hoffmann vogue in 1829 through the publication of selected tales in the *Revue de Paris*, with two complete translations of Hoffmann’s works to follow.<sup>76</sup> Rather critical of French bourgeois tastes, Balzac was highly receptive to foreign literatures and, as an avid theatregoer with a keen interest in opera, was open to Hoffmann’s musical themes and shared the latter’s affinity for vocal music. Admiring the genius he perceived in the *Kreisleriana*, Balzac was nevertheless critical of what he considered to be Hoffmann’s rêverie, his alcoholism and eccentricities: ‘[Hoffmann] sentait trop vivement, il était trop musicien pour discuter: j’ai sur lui l’avantage d’être Français et très peu musicien, je puis donner

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<sup>73</sup> This is Théophile Gautier’s expression (see Charles de Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Charpentier, 1887), pp.11-15).

<sup>74</sup> ‘Le plus grand nombre est fou d’Hoffmann. C’est une fureur, c’est un engouement, mais il est contagieux’ (*Mercure de France*, 01.05.1830). Champfleury later acknowledges Hoffmann’s key role in the formation of the fantastical genre in France: ‘C’est en France que nous avons trouvé le mot fantastique, à cause de l’étonnement et de la stupéfaction dans laquelle nous tenaient certaines œuvres d’Hoffmann’ (*Contes posthumes d’Hoffmann* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1856), p.28).

<sup>75</sup> This was the Serapion tale ‘Der Baron von B’, translated as ‘L’Archet du Baron de B’. *Le Gymnase*, 09.05.1828. Other stories include ‘Les Deux rêves’ (*La Mode*, 08.05.1830), which Balzac reworks as a ‘conte fantastique’ in December: ‘La Danse des pierres. Fantaisie’ (*La Caricature*, 09.12.1830); ‘L’Elixir de longue vie’ (*RDP*, 24.10.1830), the title and subject of which give credit to both ‘Don Juan’ (*RDP*, 09/1829) and *Die Elixire des Teufels* (published in 1829), and finally ‘Sarrasine’ (21./28.11. 1830) and ‘Une Passion dans le désert’ (26.12.1830), both in *Revue de Paris*.

<sup>76</sup> François-Adolphe Loève-Veimars, *Contes fantastiques de Hoffmann* (Paris: Renduel, 1829-1830); Théodore Toussenel, *Œuvres complètes d’E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Paris: Lefebvre, 1830).



la clef du palais où il s'enivrait'.<sup>77</sup> While some scholars rightfully point to the important Hoffmannesque tones in Balzac's 1830 novellas and go as far as to ascribe to Balzac the desire to become a 'Hoffmann français',<sup>78</sup> it must be said that Balzac's view of Hoffmann was equally critical: 'J'ai lu Hoffmann en entier; il est au-dessous de sa réputation; il y a quelque chose, mais pas grande chose; il parle bien musique'.<sup>79</sup> The above-mentioned epigraph to *Sarrasine*, which Balzac omitted from 1835 onwards,<sup>80</sup> replies explicitly to Walter Scott's Hoffmann critique,<sup>81</sup> taking up the challenge of rewriting the fantastical musical novella. Balzac's subsequent bigger projects, *Gambara* and *Massimilla Doni* explicitly address this legacy.<sup>82</sup> At the centre of Balzac's musical novellas stands a genuine yet critical admiration of his German predecessor, whose musical themes were enticing to emulate. Yet at the same time, Balzac's novellas constitute his attempt to create something different, coming to terms with what he called the irrational and mad elements in Hoffmann's œuvre. Despite their Romantic and Hoffmannesque undertones, Balzac's music novellas equally display his decidedly

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<sup>77</sup> Letter to Maurice Schlesinger, 29.05.1837. Balzac calls Hoffmann a teriyaki, a musical visionary who has lost his attachment to reality. Balzac uses this musical madness for *Gambara*, and Vendramin in *Massimilla Doni* (*Contes musicaux*, ed. Pierre Brunel (Paris: Folio, 1995), p.24).

<sup>78</sup> See Pierre Brunel's preface to *Contes musicaux*, p.18; Pierre Brunel's studies 'La Tentation Hoffmannesque chez Balzac', in *E.T.A.Hoffmann et la musique*, pp.315-24; 'Orientations européennes dans *Sarrasine*', *LAB* (1992), 73-85. In addition to the excellent Pléiade editions of all three novellas, Pierre Brunel established a folio edition that breaks with the tradition of regrouping *Gambara* and *Massimilla Doni* with *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*. Pierre Brunel explicitly places the three *contes musicaux* together, under the patronage of Hoffmann: 'Mais derrière *Sarrasine*, *Gambara* et *Massimilla Doni*, mieux vaut voir apparaître la silhouette de Johannes Kreisler et entendre les génies familiers du Djinnistan' (*Contes musicaux*, p.32).

<sup>79</sup> *Lettres à Madame Hanska*, I, p.84. Rather than criticism, this remark might imply a certain fatigue of the excessive Hoffmann vogue sweeping France at that time.

<sup>80</sup> Critics have remarked that over the years Balzac consciously integrates the novella into his *Comédie humaine*, although it was originally conceived independently. The link with Hoffmann and German Romanticism is severed from 1835 onwards. (*Etudes de mœurs au XIXe siècle* (Paris, Béchét, 1835); *La Comédie humaine*, tome X (Paris: Furne, 1844)).

<sup>81</sup> 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman', *RDP*, avril 1829. Loève-Veimars published the article as a preface to his Hoffmann edition.

<sup>82</sup> 'Vous avez, prodigue d'esprit, jeté sous ma plume ce personnage digne d'Hoffmann, ce porteur de trésors inconnus, ce pèlerin assis à la porte du Paradis, ayant des oreilles pour écouter les chants des anges, et n'ayant plus de langue pour les répéter, agitant sur les touches d'ivoire des doigts brisés par les contractions de l'inspiration divine, et croyant exprimer la musique du ciel à des auditeurs stupéfaits'. *Gambara*. Dédicace à Belloy (*CH X*, p.459).



realist style, and his explicit reference to and mirroring of society, as expressed through his *Comédie Humaine*.<sup>83</sup>

In the following, I shall discuss the novellas *Sarrasine* and *Massimilla Doni* as two key texts in Balzac's writing of the music novella. The infatuation with, and subsequent departure from, Hoffmannesque aesthetics becomes particularly evident when discussing Balzac's treatment of the woman singer in the two texts.

### A Singing Illusion: *Sarrasine*

#### Synopsis

*In a framed narrative, Balzac relates the story of a gathering at the Lanty salon (presumably in the 1830s), during which a mysterious, awe-inspiring old man intrigues the narrator's companion, the Marquise de Rochefide. The old man who instills unease and repulsion in the other guests, seems to have a special relationship with the Lanty family, in particular with the daughter, Marianina, an acclaimed singer. Upon being questioned by the marquise, the narrator goes on to tell her the story of the ghost-like creature who turns out to be none other than the once-famous castrato Zambinella, the great-uncle of the Lanty family and source of their wealth. The French painter and sculptor Sarrasine<sup>84</sup> developed an obsession with the young Zambinella, believing him to be a woman and using 'her' as a model for a female statue, which subsequently served as a blueprint for a painting of Adonis by Joseph-Marie Vien that the narrator and the marquise admire in the Lanty's salon. The novella ends with the marquise's disgust at the story.*

The novella originally contains two clearly labelled parts: 'Les deux portraits', dealing with the Lanty evening, and 'Une passion d'artiste', in which the narrator relates Sarrasine's story. While Balzac later removed these sub-headings, the novella retained its mirroring structure through the juxtaposition of two different stories, timelines and plots. The novella's two sides are linked through Zambinella and his various replicas and doppelgänger in art (Sarrasine's sculpture and Vien's painting) as

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<sup>83</sup> This realism equally underpins other singer narratives of the July Monarchy. See the case studies in chapter 7.

<sup>84</sup> Balzac probably took inspiration from 17<sup>th</sup> century painter Jean François Sarrazin. See Pierre Citron, *Pléiade* introduction, p.1037.

in real life, through the eyes of his onlookers: the young castrato is perceived by Sarrasine as the ideal woman, whereas the old patriarch is considered a hideous corpse by the marquise. And finally, Zambinella's artistic legacy in the form of his great-niece Marianina, whose singing surpasses that of the most acclaimed singers of her time, and whose mysterious poetry echoes the young Zambinella's mystery as an ideal object. Musically speaking, Balzac not only spans a century through the life of Zambinella *le centenaire*, he also embraces a major change of paradigm in musical culture, between the heyday of the Italian castrati, who triumphed while women remained banned from the stage, and the era of the acclaimed female singer, embodied by the soprano Marianina. In his initial staging of the two singers, Balzac draws on the traditional imagery of song in its mystery and ambivalence, sublimating Marianina within the realm of poeticized femininity:

Son chant faisait pâlir les talents incomplets des Malibran, des Sontag, des Fodor, chez lesquelles une qualité dominante a toujours exclu la perfection de l'ensemble; tandis que Marianina savait unir au même degré la pureté du son, la sensibilité, la justesse du mouvement et des intonations, l'âme et la science, la correction et le sentiment. Cette fille était le type de cette poésie secrète, lien commun de tous les arts, et qui fuit toujours ceux qui la cherchent.<sup>85</sup>

Far from making the girl a mere diva and representative of the trivialities of 1830s culture, Balzac explicitly links her to the secret of music and the arts as well as to the mystery that surrounds Zambinella as an old man. At the centre of Parisian gossip, Marianina's extraordinary nature blends with the mystery of her entire family, standing in sharp contrast to the salon evenings they host. Less theoretical than Hoffmann, Balzac carefully juxtaposes two different types of 'music' embodied by Zambinella and Marianina, as well as two contrasting aesthetics, developed through the very disparate contexts of Sarrasine's obsessive infatuation with the castrato and Marianina's performance in the Lanty salon. The carrier of both these opposing contexts is the

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<sup>85</sup> CH VII, p.1045. We find here the familiar reference to well-known singers, both a sign of Balzac's realism and a frequent device in 1830s and 1840s French music novellas.



surviving castrato Zambinella, who is also the source of the ‘fantastical’ element in the novella:

C’était un homme. La première fois qu’il se montra dans l’hôtel, ce fut pendant un concert, où il semblait avoir été attiré vers le salon par la voix enchanteresse de Marianina. [...] Sans être précisément un vampire, une goule, un homme artificiel, une espèce de Faust ou de Robin des bois, il participait, au dire des gens amis du fantastique, de toutes ces natures anthropomorphes.<sup>86</sup>

Although the narrator quickly exposes the creature as ‘*simplement un vieillard*’ (while at the same time criticizing some Germans who believe in the ghost tales spread about the man), the novella’s fantastical element remains the old man and his mysterious connection to the Lanty family. In comparison, *Sarrasine* certainly does not comply with the Hoffmannesque horror intruding into daily life. The resolution of *Sarrasine* does not lie within the human psyche and the insoluble conflict between musical ideals and mechanics, but rather implies the contrast between Sarrasine’s illusions and an almost casual contemplation of the old castrato and his life, together with the relief that ‘on n’y fait plus de ces malheureuses créatures’.<sup>87</sup> In this, the fantastical of *Sarrasine* differs from that of Hoffmann’s tales in that it appears natural and explicable. Ultimately, there is a rational explanation to the horror of both *Sarrasine* and the 1830 salonnières who are scared of Zambinella. The *fantastique* is less something psychologically motivated than an externalized phenomenon of the gaze, and of a *trompe-l’œil* that can be resolved. The narrator himself, while being well aware of Zambinella’s life story, experiences the evening at the Lantys’ as a profoundly ambivalent situation, with regard to his surroundings and the ambivalence and mystery surrounding the Lanty family. The novella’s opening masterfully exposes this state of ambivalent reverie, tying it into Hoffmann’s aesthetics of the dream state and the ensuing widening of the human consciousness:

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1047.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1075.

J'étais plongé dans une de ces rêveries profondes qui saisissent tout le monde, même un homme frivole, au sein des fêtes les plus tumultueuses. [...] Les arbres, imparfaitement couverts de neige, se détachaient faiblement du fond grisâtre que formait un ciel nuageux, à peine blanchi par la lune. Vus au sein de cette atmosphère fantastique, ils ressemblaient vaguement à des spectres mal enveloppés de leurs linceuls, image gigantesque de la fameuse *danse des morts*. Puis, en me retournant de l'autre côté, je pouvais admirer la danse des vivants!<sup>88</sup>

Repeatedly throughout the narration, these 'two paintings' or scenes are evoked in their ambivalence, as the narrator, 'sur la frontière de ces deux tableaux', experiences his presence at the Lantys' as a borderline state between life and death, society and nature, conversations and music, finally witnessing the gossip surrounding the Lanty family, and especially the strikingly negative reactions towards Zambinella, who appears as a ghost among the living, adding to the Lantys' mysterious demeanour: 'Cette mystérieuse famille avait tout l'attrait d'un poème de lord Byron [...]: un chant obscur et sublime de strophe en strophe'.<sup>89</sup> The fantastical element gains momentum through this enigmatic character, 'cette créature sans nom dans le langage humain, forme sans substance, être sans vie, ou vie sans action',<sup>90</sup> whose appearances cause the most ridiculous speculations and whose importance for the Lanty family is equally left ambiguous: 'Il semblait que ce fût une personne enchantée de qui dépendissent le bonheur, la vie ou la fortune de tous. Etait-ce crainte ou affection?'<sup>91</sup>

The deeply disturbing effect of the old man is resolved in two stages, as Balzac moves from the uncanny that surrounds Zambinella and 'her' art (tied to the poetic ideal of Marianina) to the realities of the contemporary salon: firstly, through the narrator's account of Zambinella's past, in which he tells of Sarrasine's infatuation with the woman singer, an error resolved only at the end; and, in a second act, through Zambinella's revelation as Marianina's great uncle, a clandestine patriarch who is the source of the Lantys' fortune and vocal ancestor to the young soprano. In conclusion, after a play on ambivalence and illusion, the narrator resolves Zambinella, now securely placed in the 1830 salon, listening to a new mystery of song, albeit the exact opposite of

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1043.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1046.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1051.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1048.



the horrific castrato voice: that of Marianina, the ‘poésie secrète’. Song (and its implied ambivalence) is a crucial factor in Balzac’s conceptualization of the mystery of Zambinella, as it is in the novella’s overall treatment of the fantastical; yet it just as much serves the author’s final resolution of the conflict between the ideal and the real, where he moves from the illusion of the castrato to the realistic appeal of the soprano.

### **The Mystery of Artistic Legacy: Zambinella and Marianina**

‘Echappé de sa chambre, comme un fou de sa loge, le petit vieillard s’était sans doute adroitement coulé derrière une haie de gens attentifs à la voix de Marianina, qui finissait la cavatine de Tancrède’.<sup>92</sup> The relationship between Zambinella and Marianina, as well as the song aesthetics they embody is most remarkable, linking the *fantastique* to music and creating complicity between these two secretive singers through artistic lineage and patronage, while equally emphasizing the narration’s transition from the musical uncanny to a realistic resolution. Their ambivalent relationship is implied through Zambinella’s presence during Marianina’s performances and the young girl’s affection for her old uncle, regardless of the horror he may inspire in her. Their relationship is marked by the secret of music and artistic kinship, which manifests itself as an intimate form of musical communication that seems to belong to the two of them exclusively:

Addio, addio! disait-elle avec les inflexions les plus jolies de sa jeune voix. Elle ajouta même sur la dernière syllabe une roulade admirablement bien exécutée, mais à voix basse, et comme pour peindre l’effusion de son cœur par une expression poétique. Le vieillard, frappé subitement par quelque souvenir, resta sur le seuil de ce réduit secret. Nous entendîmes alors, grâce à un profond silence, le soupir lourd qui sortit de sa poitrine: il tira la plus belle des bagues dont ses doigts de squelette étaient chargés, et la plaça dans le sein de Marianina.<sup>93</sup>

It is probable that Zambinella, providing the family fortune, paid for and supervised Marianina’s musical tuition, which made her into one of the finest singers of her

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1050.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1055.



generation.<sup>94</sup> Despite the ghostly illusion as which he appears in the first half of the novella, Zambinella is in reality a powerful character, not only due to his status in the Lanty family, but more importantly as an artist, which only becomes clear when the narration contrasts Sarrasine's blind infatuation with the singer's refusal to become his mistress. The sculptor's illusion is a quintessential self-betrayal of the artist who, dangerously placing seeking to imitate Pygmalion, is not able to differentiate between real life and illusion: 'C'était plus qu'une femme, c'était un chef-d'œuvre! [...]' Sarrasine dévorait des yeux la statue de Pygmalion, pour lui descendue de son piédestal. Quand la Zambinella chanta, ce fut un délire. L'artiste eut froid'.<sup>95</sup> In sharp contrast to the sculptor's persistence, Zambinella tries to dissuade him by insisting on her status as an artist whose life is the stage and who cannot love in the prosaic way: 'Le théâtre sur lequel vous m'avez vue, ces applaudissements, cette musique, cette gloire, à laquelle on m'a condamnée, voilà ma vie, je n'en ai pas d'autre'.<sup>96</sup> In these two opposing artistic types, Balzac rewrites crucial aspects of Romantic *Künstlerliebe*, which Hoffmann epitomized in the Kreisler figure. It is the seemingly more artificial artist, the castrato Zambinella who proclaims a more realistic, truthful concept of art, detaching himself from human emotion and not confusing art with love,<sup>97</sup> whilst the sculptor builds up a dangerous, and ultimately fatal, obsession with his beloved muse, making her the sole object of his artistic creativity.

The *fantastique* in *Sarrasine* thus also appears as part of the mystery of art and its different encodings throughout the novel – especially with regard to the gender play and the castrato's effect on his surroundings. Sarrasine's illusions of the sublime woman and hence the ideal of the art object and the fantasy of song are crushed by the most prosaic revelation of the castrato, turning both the sculpture and the painting into

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<sup>94</sup> Katherine Kolb acknowledges the important position the castrati held in passing on their art as voice teachers and patrons ('The Tenor of *Sarrasine*', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 120 (October 2005), 1560-75: p.1565)

<sup>95</sup> CH VII, p.1061. This scene is reminiscent of Balzac's *Le chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, but also of the Romantic *Künstlerliebe* and the illusion of ideal femininity, to which characters like Fischer's painter Stephani fall prey. See also Haböck, pp.254-59.

<sup>96</sup> CH VII, p.1070.

<sup>97</sup> Balzac reprises this important aspect of professional artistry (which received renewed interest after the posthumous [1830] publication of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*) in *Massimilla Doni*.



abstract aesthetic ideals, strangely detached from the person and artist who inspired both. On the other hand, Zambinella not only survives the dangerous illusion of art and love, he is literally a survivor in 1830, defying his abnormal physicality and the horrors of castration through his longevity, his eccentric attire and ‘coquetterie féminine’<sup>98</sup> – they are no more than a horrific reminder of the past. Zambinella passes his artistic legacy on to Marianina, the archetype of a new generation of singers, as the aesthetics of the singer evolve from visual to auditory. The singer Zambinella existed exclusively through the sculptor’s gaze, as her gender play went on through her stage roles, through the sculpture *Sarrasine* made of her and the subsequent painting of Adonis. In 1830 these chimaeras of the singer dissolve through the narrator’s story just as much as through Marianina’s song which still conjures up the memory of the castrato. However, he is now nothing more than an old man whom the young singer sees off with an ‘Addio’ and who is replaced by the soprano’s realistic performance. In both types of artistic legacy, from Zambinella to Marianina, and from the sculpture to the painting, two very different aesthetics and approaches survive and challenge the onlooker to solve the mystery of art – yet the necessity of a transition from past to present, and from *Sarrasine*’s artistic illusion and Zambinella’s false song ideal to the reality of the 1830s is made clear.<sup>99</sup>

Looking back at Hoffmann and his aesthetics of *Entgrenzung* and attempts at artistic completeness and communion, and comparing *Sarrasine* to a novella like *Das Sanctus* for instance, we see that, in a similar way, Balzac employs the central story as a cathartic element for the main narration, through which the mystery of Zambinella is revealed – more precisely: through which the illusion of Zambinella is exposed as a complex interplay of gender, music and artistic illusion, which show us that authoritative, pre-conceived artistic categories are made redundant through the artist’s agency. The different visual clues, paired with speculation and fantastical allure, are layers that gradually make space for the artist behind these layers, namely Zambinella

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<sup>98</sup> CH VII, p.1052.

<sup>99</sup> Citron links this necessary evolution to Balzac’s own development, his different artistic concepts and own states of mind (‘Interprétation de *Sarrasine*’, LAB 1972, pp.90ff); Pléiade introduction, p.1040.

who, in 1830, makes room for the next generation of singers. The conflict between the ideal sublime of song and its inherent uncanny which appears as an inevitable core of female musicality and which is here created through the traits of the horrific Zambinella dissolves. What remains of the romantic *Spuk*, and its implied fantasy of female song, is the reality of 1830, and of Marianina the singer, so mundanely backed by her great-uncle's money. The originality and strength of Balzac's novella lie in this apologia for artistic lineage and the singer's strong position, through which he pronounces more clearly than his German predecessor that a reconciliation of art and artist, ideal and mechanics, is possible and that fixed categories of art and sex/gender may become redundant without harming the artist. This constitutes an enticing concept referring to the singer and the myth of androgyny and completeness associated with the singing voice. Reminiscent of earlier authors, Balzac points to the soprano voice and her ghostly predecessor the castrato, as the song of the future - a stance which aptly prefigures the music enthusiasm of the July Monarchy and its prima donna myth.



## Tuer l'idéal I: *Massimilla Doni*

Chargeons-nous d'eux? demanda la princesse à son mari, car cet homme est resté fidèle à l'IDÉAL que nous avons tué.<sup>100</sup>

With *Massimilla Doni* and its companion piece *Gambara*, Balzac moves away from *Sarrasine* and early tales more explicitly written under the patronage of Hoffmann. Commissioned by Maurice Schlesinger for his *Gazette Musicale*, and written as the outcome of Balzac's Italian journey, the two novellas not only fit more smoothly into the 1830s feuilleton vogue, but they are also the result of perhaps Balzac's most intense reflections on music and his negotiations of musical ideals and realities. *Massimilla Doni* unites the contemplation of music and love with the rising *Risorgimento* spirit, well known to French audiences since *Corinne*, which Balzac became familiar with while staying in Italy.<sup>101</sup> The parallels between Balzac's and Staël's work are interesting in that they both chose female characters to embody an artistic, progressive vision of Italy, and the hope for a better future.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, the novella's denouement apparently left Balzac unsatisfied, and has continued to raise criticism since.<sup>103</sup> As we shall see in this section, the somewhat controversial ending reflects Balzac's unusual treatment of musical and feminine ideals, as personified in the two antagonistic female characters, the angelic Massimilla and the diabolic singer Clara. In fact, the novella's overall concept offers ample opportunity to

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<sup>100</sup> CH X, p.516. Balzac's emphasis. The denouement of *Gambara* introduces the reader to Massimilla, now married to Emilio, who becomes patron to the mad musician.

<sup>101</sup> Having finished a first draft in May 1837, Balzac reworked the novella by chapters, the subheadings of which were abolished in the final version, but which remain nevertheless recognizable, most importantly the third chapter dealing with the performance and discussion of 'L'opéra de *Mosè*'. The other chapters are 'Les deux amours', which deals with Emilio's love dilemma between Massimilla Doni and the singer Clarina Tinti; 'La vie italienne', dealing with evenings at La Fenice and in particular with the tenor Genovese's fiasco; and the closing chapter 'Les deux guérisons', in which Emilio's and Massimilla's love dilemma is resolved.

<sup>102</sup> Ginette Fainas draws attention to the similarities between *Massimilla Doni* and Jules Janin's novella *Gabrielli*: 'Jules Janin inspirateur de Balzac. Une source inattendue de Massimilla Doni', *LAB* 1961, 223-26.

<sup>103</sup> See René Guise's Pléiade introduction to *Massimilla Doni*. On this occasion, Mariane Bury speaks of a 'défaut de composition' ('Les Français en Italie dans *Massimilla Doni*', *LAB*, 13 [1992], p.207).

discuss this unusual vision of femininity as well as its intertextual affinities with, but also departure from, more Hoffmannesque musical themes.<sup>104</sup>

## **The conte musical**

### **Synopsis**

*Emilio Memmi, an impoverished Venetian prince, is in love with Massimilla Doni, an unhappily married, saintly woman. Since Emilio regards her as the pure, perfect ideal of womanhood, he is unable to consummate his relationship with her. Emilio is seduced by Clara Tinti, a highly sensual woman and the current diva at the Fenice, who is in turn pursued by Massimilla's husband, the duke Cataneo, and her singing partner, the tenor Genovese. The lovers' confusion is eventually resolved when Massimilla assumes Clara's place and seduces Emilio. The ending suggests that Clara is reunited with Genovese and that they resume their artistic collaboration.*

Against the socio-cultural background outlined earlier, but also considering Balzac's own preoccupation with music, his love for Rossini and response to Hoffmann, there can be no doubt about the importance of the musical element: it underpins the entire story. The novella is structured around musical life in Venice, especially the performances at La Fenice and the socializing of music lovers of the upper classes with artists, notably the prima donna Clara Tinti and her partner, the tenor Genovese. Throughout the novella, we are confronted with different concepts of music and love: both their interdependence and the author's contrasting of musical ideal and reality. Balzac leaves ample space for reflections on the musical sublime, on the voice and on song as well as on the problematic link between ideal music and femininity which, much more than in *Sarrasine*, stands in contrast to the novella's realistic tone.

One cannot help but acknowledge the almost eccentric musical statements exhibited by some characters in the novella – most importantly the duke Cataneo and Vendramin.

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<sup>104</sup> '[L'auteur] ressemblera presque à un des héros à moitié fou d'Hoffmann'. *Une Fille d'Ève/Massimilla Doni* (Paris: Hypolite Souverain, 1839), preface (my emphasis).



The former is Massimilla's husband and Clara's patron; in a similar obsession to that of Hoffmann's Krespel, he derives his sole pleasure in life from finding the perfect harmony between his violin and Clara's voice:

Tout ce qui produit chez l'homme un élan et le rattache au ciel par le désir ou par le feu du plaisir, tient non pas tant à la musique qu'à un effet pris dans les innombrables effets de la musique, à un accord parfait entre deux voix, ou entre une voix et la chanterelle de son violon. Le vieux singe s'assied sur moi, prend son violon, il joue assez bien, il en tire des sons, je tâche de les imiter, et quand arrive le moment longtemps cherché où il est impossible de distinguer dans la masse du chant quel est le son du violon, quelle est la note sortie de mon gosier, ce vieillard tombe alors en extase, ses yeux morts jettent leurs derniers feux, il est heureux, il se roule à terre comme un homme ivre.<sup>105</sup>

Far from approaching music as an ideal, Cataneo, a 'musical mechanic', derives physical pleasure, an ecstatic 'ivresse', from his musical experiments with Clara, which are clearly couched in terms of sexual imagery. Opposed to such base, decadent notions of music is Vendramin, whose musical reverie complements his grieving over the lost glory of Venice and his incurable opium addiction: 'Après avoir entendu des voix ravissantes, avoir saisi la musique par tous mes pores, avoir éprouvé de poignantes délices, et dénoué les plus chaudes amours du paradis de Mahomet, j'en suis aux images terribles'.<sup>106</sup> Such musical and personal eccentricities unite Cataneo and Vendramin with another musical enthusiast, Capraja who, Vendramin recounts, was acquainted with Gambara in Cremona and who, striving towards a sublime ideal, also uses music to distract himself from his prosaic existence – a trait these men share with Emilio, caught in his ideal, platonic love for Massimilla: 'ils vont dans l'Art là où te conduit ton extrême amour, là où me mène l'opium. Ils ne peuvent plus être entendus que par leurs pairs. [...] Eh bien, le duc et Capraja [...] sont fous de musique'.<sup>107</sup> What reunites these musical discourses is the concept of music as an idealised art form:

Cette langue, mille fois plus riche que celle des mots, est au langage ce que la pensée est à la parole; elle réveille les sensations et les idées sous leur forme même, là où chez

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<sup>105</sup> CH X, p.561.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.576. Through the *Mahomet* reference, Balzac links Vendramin to Gambara's madness.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.584.



nous naissent les idées et les sensations, mais en les laissant ce qu'elles sont chez chacun. Cette puissance sur notre intérieur est une des grandeurs de la musique. Les autres arts imposent à l'esprit des créations définies, la musique est infinie dans les siennes.<sup>108</sup>

Echoing Early Romantic aesthetics discussed earlier, Balzac conceptualizes music as an infinite art form which profoundly affects the listener. Music is superior to other art forms, promoting artistic synaesthesia, as it is capable of expressing everything.<sup>109</sup> The novella's protagonists thus appear to substitute a prosaic existence with music: Vendramin escapes his situation through music and opium, Cataneo through his musical experiments with Clara and Capraja through musical ecstasy. As for Emilio's idealized love for Massimilla, he finds it reflected in the musical 'royaume tout spirituel des abstractions',<sup>110</sup> whereas Massimilla complements this stereotype by stating that 'Il n'y a que la musique pour exprimer l'amour'.<sup>111</sup> Of all the characters, Massimilla comes closest to delivering a rational discourse on music, through her analysis of *Mosè*, thus counterbalancing the musical reverie embodied by the principal male characters— yet she, too, often speaks of both music and love in idealized terms that sabotage more realistic life models.

It is not surprising then that vocal music, and concepts of the human voice as the ideal instrument to express the sublime, occupy a central place in the narrative treatment of music, and that the two singers, Genovese and Tinti, appear central to the novella's plot, because not only do they serve as important anchor points for the somewhat abstract musical ideals voiced by other characters in the novel, but they illustrate more than others the problematic link between love and art, ideal and reality. What's more, although she embodies certain ideals and fantasies attached to female song, Clara Tinti significantly contributes to the dissolution of these ideals through her own strong sense of artistic integrity and professionalism.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.587-88.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.608-609.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.585.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.578.

## Concepts of the Voice: Genovese, Tinti, Massimilla

More than other instruments in *Massimilla Doni*, the voice links the ideal of music, and its conceptualisation through the musical discourse to the practicalities of musicianship as well as to the interpersonal relationships between the two main couples, Emilio/Massimilla and Genovese/Tinti. These interdependences become even more crucial during the performance of *Mosè*, in which, accompanied by Massimilla's lengthy commentary on the opera, Tinti and Genovese perform, the latter experiencing a complete fiasco. Genovese and Tinti are far from being idealized, sublime singers but rather contrast with both Massimilla's intellectual musical analysis and Capraja's and Cateneo's debate over the ideal embodiment of song: 'La voix de Genovese s'empare des fibres', dit Capraja. – 'Et celle de la Tinti s'attaque au sang', répondit le duc'.<sup>112</sup> What makes the two singers stand out against the musical enthusiasm and fantasy exhibited by other characters is their human quality, their imperfections and the fact that they are juxtaposed to utterly ideal characters like Massimilla and Emilio, whose chaste love, as we have seen, is likened to the ideal of music, and aptly expressed through Massimilla's theoretical commentary on the opera performance. Genovese experiences the worst scenario for a tenor, losing all self-control during a performance as he emits nothing but animalistic sounds: 'Genovese brame comme un cerf', dit le prince. Ce duetto, le premier que chantait la Tinti, était en effet troublé par la déroute complète de Genovese. Dès que le ténor chanta de concert avec la Tinti, sa belle voix changea'.<sup>113</sup> Thus interrupting Massimilla's speech on Italian opera, Genovese is anything but sublime song. Obsessively in love with Tinti, he exhibits rather the clear signs of an artist no longer in control of himself, and who has lost the precious emotional detachment needed in his profession: 'Quand un artiste a le malheur d'être plein de la passion qu'il veut exprimer, il ne saurait la peindre, car il est la chose même au lieu

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.583.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.596.



d'en être l'image. L'art procède du cerveau et non du cœur'.<sup>114</sup> What's more, Genovese's animalistic demeanour verbalizes the downside of love, its basest expression through guttural sounds devoid of any aesthetic quality or beauty, parodying Massimilla's intellectual commentary on opera and her idealization of music as the language that best expresses love. Her literally 'disembodied' speech is countered by Genovese's disenchanted, bodily song.<sup>115</sup> Yet even when regaining his sublime voice during a solo performance, Genovese is far from appearing as the ideal of song but rather presents himself as a vain, self-centred artist:

Jamais la musique ne mérita mieux son épithète de divine. [...] Comme la passion était sainte! Mais quel affreux réveil la vanité du ténor préparait à ces nobles émotions. 'Suis-je un mauvais chanteur?' dit Genovese, après avoir terminé l'air. Tous regrettèrent que l'instrument ne fût pas une chose céleste. Cette musique angélique était donc due à un sentiment d'amour-propre blessé'.<sup>116</sup>

However, the musical ideal that Genovese is able to demonstrate when singing alone serves as the blueprint for Emilio's idealized love for Massimilla, as his friends decide on a strategy to help him:

Il peut voir sa maîtresse toujours sublime et pure, toujours entendre en lui-même ce que nous venons d'écouter au bord de la mer, [...] et cet homme n'aspire qu'à barbouiller cette poésie! Par mon ministère, il réunira son amour sensuel et son amour céleste dans cette seule femme! Enfin il fera comme nous tous, il aura une maîtresse. Il possédait une divinité, le malheureux veut en faire une femelle!<sup>117</sup>

Clarina, *la femelle* as much as *la divina*, appears in stark contrast to both the idealized *woman-music* Massimilla and Genovese, as an artistically integral singer. She performs her musical duties flawlessly, rescuing Genovese's fiasco through her outstanding performance, while giving Massimilla ample opportunity to illustrate her

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.613. Further on the tenor laments: 'Mon âme et mon gosier ne font qu'un seul soufflé. The importance of artistic professionalism and emotional detachment was already voiced in *Corinne*, *Margarethe* and *Sarrasine*.

<sup>115</sup> See Jeannine Jallat, 'Petite poétique du corps empêché', *Littérature*, 60 (December 1985), p.87. Jallat provides a very interesting treatment of voice and body in *Massimilla Doni*, linking Genovese's fiasco to the fear of castration.

<sup>116</sup> *CH X*, p.612.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.613.



musical analysis. Clara, it seems, is less affected by a troubled physicality than other characters, such as Vendramin, Capraja and Cataneo, who all escape the burden of their bodies, whereas Emilio and Massimilla contemplate each other in ideal, disembodied terms only. Clara however is the archetype of female physicality, seducing Emilio and inspiring in him a desire for real, complete love which he is unable to realize with Massimilla: 'Il croyait entendre un concert de voix angéliques, il aurait donné sa vie pour ressentir le désir que lui avait inspiré la veille, à pareille heure, la détestée Clarina; mais il ne se sentait même pas avoir un corps'.<sup>118</sup> The narration juxtaposes Massimilla, 'une divinité pure' and Clara the singer who, like a serpent, winds her arms and body around Emilio.<sup>119</sup> As I have explained in chapter 3 and shown in my discussion of Goethe, Staël and Fischer, this dichotomy of antagonistic female archetypes is paradigmatic of the broader discussion of song's ambivalent status between ideal femininity and female artistic empowerment.

Although one could assess the Tinti character quite critically<sup>120</sup> as a venus-figure and as the archetypal embodiment of the *femme fatale* (at least from Emilio's point of view) who, as a sensual, carnal singer, seduces Emilio and threatens his ideal love for Massimilla, she also invites a different reading which makes sense in the light of Balzac's overall agenda. While Tinti possesses certain characteristics of the sensual seductress, a role mostly implied by her nocturnal encounter with Emilio, it must be said that in terms of the artistic concept, she is the most accomplished and realistic character to embrace and inhabit a form of ideal music, and she adds both depth and realism to the concept of female song. As a woman and a singer, she is caught between different concepts of music and love, such as Cataneo's musical experiments with her and her appropriation by Massimilla's highly intellectual speech on opera. It is through her love and sensuality that Emilio, caught between 'les deux amours' becomes even more aware of his painfully idealized love for Massimilla. Massimilla must reconcile

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.579.

<sup>119</sup> The narration emphasizes different body parts for each woman: the head and the hand for Massimilla, the foot for Clara.

<sup>120</sup> See Maxime Prévost, 'Portrait de la femme auteur en cantatrice', in *Masculin/Féminin*: pp.121-35 (pp.122-23).

within herself idealized love and the sensuality represented by Clara, and thus two different visions of female musicality – only then are Emilio and Massimilla able to consummate their love and kill an unhealthy ideal. Whereas the novella concludes with an unflattering picture of the now pregnant Massimilla, Clara Tinti remains the artist in the professional sense of the word, singing divinely with the now recovered Genovese ‘[qui] ne s’occupait plus de séduire la prima donna par une méthode angélique’.<sup>121</sup> Regardless of having sacrificed her love for Emilio, Clara’s voice remains unaffected, a sign of her emotional detachment and artistic professionalism. While her voice is an object of veneration and a much talked-about conceptualized expression of the sublime, the singer herself remains remarkably unaffected by such idealizations, all the while embodying, even owning them. Contrary to Genovese, Clara’s love for Emilio does not sabotage her singing but rather she sings ‘d’une voix troublée par le désir. Son chant fut une brise qui apportait au cœur les caresses de l’amour’.<sup>122</sup> Despite her love for Emilio, whom she calls ‘idol’ (thus mimicking Emilio’s veneration of Massimilla), she is professional and realistic enough to sacrifice this love in the end in order to enable Emilio and Massimilla to consummate their love.

As mentioned above, the novella’s staged end has received criticism. On a primary level, the French doctor’s trick to cure Emilio by having Massimilla pretend to be Clara does seem simplistic. Yet in the light of the novella’s overall structure and theme, which emphasizes the cross-referencing and mirroring between different concepts of art and love, arguing against ideals and categories, the final twist for the female character makes much more sense, as it destroys the artificial ideal of sublime femininity. As far as the female singer is concerned, the novella not only accords her a significant amount of artistic agency, but it further confirms a tendency already palpable in *Sarrasine*, which relates to Hoffman’s legacy in Balzac’s *contes musicaux*; rather than seeking *Entgrenzung*, Balzac, as a realist writer, argues for a reconciliation of art and artist, which may compromise the ambition of absolute, sublime art yet which offers a more liveable existence to the artist, all the while exposing the pretence of art as something

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<sup>121</sup> CH X, p.619.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.558.



inhuman and ethereal. In short, Clara remains the true, realistic embodiment of female song, reclaiming the ideal from its stylized, artificial embedding in Emilio's idealistic confusion of love and music. The love that Massimilla and Emilio are finally able to consummate and live may exclude the ideal, in terms of idealized love and idealized music. Yet, as René Guise remarks in the *Pléiade* introduction, the lovers live together the only possible, imperfect happiness.<sup>123</sup>

### **From *Entgrenzung* to Reconciliation: Moving Away from Hoffmann.**

Whereas Mariane Bury describes the novella's disenchantment with the artistic sublime, and the subsequent death of the ideal for the sake of reality, as being of a rather pessimistic nature,<sup>124</sup> Max Andréoli identifies the Balzacian concept of art as a quintessentially ambivalent interplay between sublime and parody that should ultimately expose the vanity of a sublime art concept and argue for a more harmonious, albeit a compromised approach to art that leaves room for realistic depictions of artists. Pretending to be a sublime artist implies the impossible, and also the harmful in terms of human qualities and relationships, closing the artist off from the outside world rather than encouraging an artistic compromise between ideal and reality.<sup>125</sup> If we look at the conclusion of *Massimilla Doni*, but also at *Sarrasine*, the aim for the artist should be to accept her art as a form of illusion that cannot constitute her existence exclusively – this is a trait which Balzac's artists share with characters like Krespel or the singer Bettina, who realize that their art is not synonymous with life and that they themselves cannot or must not become the art form itself – a concern equally shared by some of Fischer's protagonists. The singer needs to detach herself from the ideal of the musical feminine. Of all the characters in *Massimilla Doni*, Clara Tinti most respects this realistic concept of music, and she enables other characters, like Emilio and Genovese, to abandon their

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<sup>123</sup> René Guise, Introduction to *Massimilla Doni*, p.538.

<sup>124</sup> 'Les Français en Italie dans *Massimilla Doni*', *LAB*, 13 (1992), 207-20 (p.220).

<sup>125</sup> See Max Andréoli, 'Sublime et parodie dans les *Contes d'artistes* de Balzac', *LAB*, 15 (1994), p.36.



absolutism and their existential identifications with their emotions and beliefs. The complexity and significance of Balzac's novella lies in the connections between the different characters and their views, and especially in their ability to let go of a categorised way of thinking and to move on from the unliveable artistic ideal. More importantly, the novella breaks up the traditional, clichéd leitmotif of the *musical feminine*, of an ideal of femininity situated within the same realm as ideal, unattainable music, which lay at the core of late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century musical aesthetics. This wrong ideal applies to Massimilla and Emilio's idealization of her, and it proves inimical to healthy relationships. In this process of breaking up idealized and feminized music, Clara plays a key role. Once more the female singer, as an *artist*, appears as a substitute for older, unsustainable musical aesthetics, and as a harbinger of a modern and realist view on love and art, which relegates the ideal of sublime music and love to the realm of unhealthy habits – habits so poignantly illustrated by the case of Vendramin, for whom opium has become his sole music, and who, isolated from the world, only feels love for his lost Venice. This, according to Balzac, is clearly the wrong type of *Entgrenzung* and artistic eccentricity. Rather, he is making a statement about artistic liberation without excess, but with the acceptance of a sublime that exists through its absence, revealing itself through the artistic process, or through the audience's reaction to artistic creation and to a singer like Tinti.<sup>126</sup> In short, through the realistic implications that enclose the myth, 'le mythe enfoui sous la réalité'.<sup>127</sup> In this, Clara Tinti is faithful to Balzac's views on art and perhaps best expresses the author's rewriting of musical aesthetics under the banner of realism and reconciliation. Balzac continues to negotiate the problem hinted at by Goethe and Staël, and more urgently expressed by Fischer and Hoffmann, of the Romantic artist and his plight as articulated through the fate of the singer. Commenting on an iconic figure of his time, however, Balzac adopts a more pragmatic outlook on the realities of an increasingly professional,

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<sup>126</sup> 'La profondeur vient de l'intelligence du lecteur et non de la pensée exprimée'. Balzac, *Pensées, Sujets, Fragments*, ed. Jacques Crépet (Paris: A. Blaziot, 1910), p.665.

<sup>127</sup> *Lettres à Madame Hanska*, I, p.414. See also Max Milner, 'Les Sens 'psychiques' de Massimilla Doni et la conception balzacienne de l'âme', *LAB* (1966), pp.157-69.

sometimes trivial art scene which needs to come to terms with its early Romantic heritage, and the still resonating ideals attached to women and music.



## Hoffmann Legacies II: The Singer in Hector Berlioz's *Les Soirées de l'orchestre*

To conclude this comparatist reading of the woman singer, embracing both German Romanticism and French realism, I shall now look at a rather specific treatment of the motif in the literary work of Hector Berlioz. As one of the most important composers of French Romanticism as well as a highly respected author, Berlioz embodies like Hoffmann the image of the poet-musician and offers a fascinating contribution to the musical-literary discourse.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, he appears as a highly polemic figure of his time, misunderstood and depreciated, with a profound dislike of Parisian music circles and especially the musical tastes and aesthetics of the middle classes – a conflict which found expression in his written work and which suggests a complex reading of such an iconic motif as song and a character such as the singer. Recent criticism has rediscovered Berlioz as a writer; of music criticism, letters and his memoirs first and foremost, but also as a writer of music novellas.<sup>129</sup>

We shall in the following briefly look at Berlioz's major literary work, *Les Soirées de l'orchestre*, and its signature piece, the novella *Euphonia, ou la ville musicale*, which provides a stunning example of the subversion of Romantic song clichés through the dramatization of musical utopia undermined and destroyed by a woman singer.

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<sup>128</sup> Even recent criticism, much more interested in Berlioz's literary legacy still acknowledges the difficulty of assessing the double talent of the writer-musician. See Jacques Barzun's standard work: *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* (New York/London: Columbia University Press, 1969). Berlioz's distaste for Stendhal and Rossini, as well as his wish to blow up the Théâtre Italien are well-known (*Mémoires*, ed. Pierre Citron [Paris: Flammarion, 1991], p.93; hereafter *Mémoires*). Like most artists, Berlioz visited Italy, after winning the Prix de Rome (1831/32), but this experience proved to be a disappointment, both personally and musically. Berlioz became much more enthusiastic about Germany, a cherished experience related in *Voyage musical en Allemagne* (1844) and implied in the setting of *Euphonia* (Harz region) and *Les Soirées* (Northern Europe, presumably Germany). Katherine Kolb calls this work 'a genre of its own: the travel letter about music and its social conditions' ('Hector Berlioz', in *European Writers, The Romantic Century*, vol.6, ed. Jacques Barzun (New York: Scribner, 1985), p.789).

<sup>129</sup> See *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000); *Berlioz: Past, Present, Future. Bicentenary Essays* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), both edited by Peter Bloom; Béatrice Didier, *Berlioz écrivain* (Paris: Ministère des Affaires étrangères, 2000); *ibid.*, 'Hector Berlioz et l'art de la nouvelle', *Romantisme*, 12 (1976), 19-26; Didier, 'Berlioz conteur et écrivain', *RDP*, 77 (1970). 88-93.



## ‘Voilà l’écrivain’:<sup>130</sup> the Poet-Musician

Although his decision to write was prompted by financial need, Berlioz received remarkable recognition during his lifetime, both as a music critic, feared and admired for his polemic tone and erudite style, and as a writer of fiction:

Berlioz, outre qu’il est un grand compositeur, écrit avec une fantaisie, une verve, un esprit que bien des auteurs de profession, incapable de la moindre fugue, pourraient lui envier: Les Soirées de l’orchestre sont là pour le dire.<sup>131</sup>

A remarkably ‘literary’ composer from the start, Berlioz’s musical inspiration was intimately linked to his passion for literature and his level of literary culture.<sup>132</sup> Writing did not come as easily to him as composition, and he often described it as a laborious task: ‘La composition musicale est pour moi une fonction naturelle, un bonheur, écrire de la prose est un travail’.<sup>133</sup> The composer’s lamentations over having to write a review and suffering from writer’s block, all the while wasting precious time for composing, pervade his memoirs. Only after the success of his *Soirées* did Berlioz acknowledge himself as not only a composer, but also a ‘prosateur’.<sup>134</sup> Through the variety and literary merit of his writing and his highly original style, he is now deemed by some critics to be a truly Romantic writer, whose œuvre, challenging in style and theme, pertinently dramatizes the junction between musical and literary language and conveys the potential of musical literature, its fantastical and sublime essence.<sup>135</sup> Berlioz situates himself in the literary tradition of Hoffmann, of whom he says that ‘l’idée poétique, toujours soumise au sens musical, n’a jamais été pour lui un obstacle; j’ai fortifié,

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<sup>130</sup> See Paul Smith’s review of *Voyage musical en Allemagne*, RGM, 22.09.1844.

<sup>131</sup> Gautier’s review in *La Presse*, 28.12.1854.

<sup>132</sup> Many of his greatest compositions rework classical literary themes: *La Damnation de Faust*, *Béatrice et Bénédict*, *Les Troyens*. See Joseph-Marc Bailbé, *Berlioz et l’art lyrique: essai d’interprétation à l’usage de notre temps* (Bern: Lang, 1981).

<sup>133</sup> *Mémoires*, p.128.

<sup>134</sup> *Nouvelles lettres*, 1830-1868, ed. Jacques Barzun (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p.156. See also Kolb, ‘Hector Berlioz’, pp.798ff.

<sup>135</sup> See Didier, ‘Hector Berlioz et l’art de la nouvelle’, p.25. Kolb furthermore regards him as ‘among the world’s great letter writers’ (‘Hector Berlioz’, p.809).

embellie, et aggrandi l'une par l'autre'.<sup>136</sup> Berlioz, it seems, is not only a descendant of Hoffmann but, like his German counterpart, he rewrites important Romantic topoi while prefiguring aesthetics of French authors to come.<sup>137</sup> It is in his writings, most importantly in *Les Soirées*, that Berlioz expresses his chief concerns as a musician: his hatred for mediocre music and dilettantism as well as for artistic vanity on the one hand, and his unlimited love for musical ideals and for artistic freedom and excellence on the other. Drawing on music as its chief source of inspiration, Berlioz's literary style, at times deeply polemic, ironic or parodic, aptly expresses these extremes.

### The Berliozian Singer: Goddess or Monster?

Berlioz's primary concern, as a musician and a writer, was to propagate and uphold the 'right' music (in terms of ideals and practice), and his remarks on song and the singer are numerous. When looking at his writing as a whole, one notices his interest in questions pertaining to song in general and to the music industry of his time, and he was rather appreciative of its outstanding singers. Like most Romantics, Berlioz considered the human voice to be the musical instrument of choice to create the fragile balance between musical technique and the human element, between the personality of the musician and the demands of the art form,<sup>138</sup> the archetypal 'embodiment' of vocal music that appears as a crucial aspect of singer and song: [Madame Branchu] m'a semblé la tragédie lyrique incarnée'.<sup>139</sup> Like Hoffmann and Balzac, Berlioz, though a professional in the proper sense, was susceptible to and continued to rewrite the Romantic imagery of the human voice, of song and in particular of female song and its underlying ideals. What transpires in his writings then is the constant oscillation

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<sup>136</sup> *Œuvres littéraires: I. Les soirées de l'orchestre, II. Les grotesques de la musique, III. À travers chants*, ed. Léon Guichard (Paris: Gründ, 1968-1971), vol.II, p.32 (hereafter *OL*). The affinity becomes even clearer when we look at the *Soirées de l'orchestre*, composed in reference to Hoffmann's tales.

<sup>137</sup> This applies especially to fin de siècle aesthetics (Didier, 'Berlioz conteur et écrivain', p.90). Didier argues for the canonization of Berlioz as a *conteur*.

<sup>138</sup> See *OL* III, p.129; Bailbé, *Berlioz et l'art lyrique*, pp.55ff.

<sup>139</sup> *OL* III, p.229.



between genuine admiration for prima donnas whom he considered to embody the ideal of music to perfection and, at the other end of the scale, his merciless criticism of artistic egotism and capriciousness: '[Madame Schröder-Devrient] est possédée du démon de la personnalité'.<sup>140</sup> For Berlioz, the musician must first and foremost choose to serve music, not her ego or any kind of financial or social objective. A notable example is Henriette Sontag, whom Berlioz praises without limits as the German nightingale who communicated the 'chant secret' to the French: 'Elle chantait aussi la musique, la grande musique immortelle, comme les musiciens rêvent parfois de l'entendre chanter. [...] elle savait enfin tout l'art du chant'.<sup>141</sup> At the same time, this praise is part of a large-scale criticism of Sontag's constant search for fame and money, which, in Berlioz's opinion, led to her untimely decline. Her money, he argues, would have been better invested in musical education.<sup>142</sup>

Although, as we shall see, his literary treatment may at first glance suggest so, Berlioz does not criticize the prima donna in harsher tones than other musicians. Rather, he joins ranks with authors like Goethe, Balzac and Hoffmann who, contrary to the ambiguous socio-cultural and aesthetic implications outlined in chapters 2 and 3, were quite benevolent towards women singers and readily responded to the imagery of female song in more varied ways than musical-literary aesthetics might suggest. What Berlioz polemicizes is artistic vanity and the musical establishment which perverts the artist into an egocentric, materialistic monster who sins against the sanctity of music. In this regard, Berlioz becomes unforgiving towards certain singers, whether they be sopranos, tenors or baritones,<sup>143</sup> just as he is unforgiving towards an amateurish and disrespectful Parisian audience. What can be read between the lines is a certain sense of regret about what he considers the betrayal of some singers like Sontag, paired with the implicit wish for artistic companionship, but also his own reconciliation to the discrepancy between musical ideal and reality, a debate he shares with other authors of the time: 'Sontag, une artiste, une artiste sainte, possédant réellement tous les dons de

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<sup>140</sup> *Mémoires*, p.384. Berlioz is moreover very critical of the singer's 'Sprechgesang' (*ibid.*).

<sup>141</sup> *OL II*, pp.255-56.

<sup>142</sup> *OL II*, p.257.

<sup>143</sup> See for example *OL I*, p.91.

l'art et de la nature: la voix, le sentiment musical, l'instinct dramatique, le style, le goût le plus exquis, la passion, la rêverie, la grâce, tout est quelque chose de plus que tout'.<sup>144</sup> Far from being a one-dimensional blueprint or a fixed ideal that the author upholds, Berlioz's ideal singer thus is the genuine, accomplished artist who serves the art form without falling prey to either too much identification or to the mundanity of the social creature – in other words: talent and economy.

Interestingly, it is in the prima donna that Berlioz sees the ideal of music embodied, whereas he views the male singer as much more of a social being, prone to capriciousness and vanity.<sup>145</sup> In Berlioz's writing there is ample recognition of, and fascination with, the individuality of the singer, her unique personality – perhaps even, between the lines, an admiration for this strong type of woman artist who, not unlike Berlioz himself in music, defies pre-conceived socio-cultural norms and categories and somewhat boldly inherits from both the romantic ideal of female song and the realism and professionalism of his own time. In this unique aspect alone, Berlioz stands out among many writers of the 1830s and 1840s. His singer is anything but a weak character, and his admiration as well as his ambivalent stance towards her comes through clearly in his literary work, which shows strong allegiance to musical ideals while at the same time grappling with the author's profound disillusion with the very same ideals. Yet the singer's strength is not free of ambivalence and Berlioz (deeply affected by strong women artists like the actress Harriet Smithson and the singer Marie Recio, but also disappointed by women such as Camille Pleyel) proposes a highly innovative, ambiguous treatment of the woman singer in his best-known novella, *Euphonia*.

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<sup>144</sup> OL II, p.255.

<sup>145</sup> See OL II, p.286.



## A Utopian Space? *Les soirées de l'orchestre*

Il y a dans le nord de l'Europe un théâtre lyrique où il est d'usage que les musiciens, dont plusieurs sont gens d'esprit, se livrent à la lecture et même à des causeries plus ou moins littéraires et musicales pendant l'exécution de tous les opéras médiocres.<sup>146</sup>

Compiled and published during Berlioz's London exile, the *Soirées* reflect as much the author's continuous frustration with France as his vision of musical utopia: the setting is that of an ideal orchestra of *musiciens lettrés*, who, for 25 evenings engage in literary readings and debates, whenever the opera they are supposed to perform is deemed unworthy – which is the case with most Italian and French operas. Thus, the narration consists of an explicit interplay between music and literature in a kind of redoubled *feuilleton du silence*,<sup>147</sup> where bad music is substituted by the text, in a community of like-minded artists, led by the passionate violinist Corsino.<sup>148</sup> 'Ce sont des nouvelles, historiètes, contes, romans, coups de fouet, critiques et discussions où la musique ne prend part qu'épisodiquement et non théoriquement, des brios, des dialogues'.<sup>149</sup> The thematic and structural echo of Hoffmann is no coincidence: Initially, Berlioz intended to entitle his compilation *Les Contes de l'orchestre*, referring to Hoffmann's story compilations and musical themes, but also to specific narrative frames like in the *Serapionsbrüder*. In the *Soirées*' prologue, he furthermore establishes the link to Balzac's *Comédie humaine* as another point of reference for his personal concept of a 'Comédie musicale' which the *Soirées* truly are, as they display Berlioz's wit and irony when condemning the entire Parisian music scene, while also revealing the encompassing, existential drama of humanity and the tragedy of the artist. As in his criticism, Berlioz shows the entire breadth of his musical enthusiasm in his novellas,

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<sup>146</sup> OL I, Prologue, p.21.

<sup>147</sup> On Berlioz's music criticism, see Ellis, 'The Criticism', pp.161f.

<sup>148</sup> The irritable, passionate Corsino bears a strong resemblance to Berlioz himself, but has also been read as an allegory for Napoleon, and Berlioz's nostalgia for better times (Kolb, 'Tales of Sound and Fury', in *Berlioz: Past, Present, Future*, pp.78-81).

<sup>149</sup> Letter to Joseph d'Ortigue, 5.5.1852, *Correspondance Générale*, ed. Pierre Citron, 8 vol. (Paris: Flammarion, 1972-2003), IV, p.151 (hereafter CG).

oscillating between the two extremes of musical utopia (as in the design of the musical society of *Euphonia* and the outer narrative frame of the ideal orchestra) and his rage at musical philistinism and the betrayal of the sanctity of music, which is catalysed through the theme of revenge in his novellas. Among the novellas, *Euphonia* expresses perhaps most vividly these extremes in Berlioz's understanding of music, and more interestingly, they stage the woman singer as the key player between musical idealism and its (auto-)destruction.

### **Tuer l'idéal II: *Euphonia*, or Musical Dystopia**

*Euphonia, ou la ville musicale, nouvelle de l'avenir* was originally written as a classical *conte musical* in the *RGM*, at the height of popularity of the musical feuilleton and among a number of texts staging the woman singer, shortly after Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's *Domenica* and George Sand's *Consuelo*. After his inspirational journey to Germany, it is there, in the Harz region, that he situates his ideal musical city Euphonia, ruled by an art-loving German emperor and populated by an ideal musical society in which everyone has a precise function in order to serve the ideal of music. The city's infrastructure, social system and hierarchy is constructed entirely according to musical principles as well as each citizen's merit as a musician, and their ability to contribute to the apotheosis of music. Setting his story in the year 2344, Berlioz is quite original in developing his novella's futuristic theme, for example through the use of air transportation.

A Danish woman singer, Mina, intrudes into this peaceful utopia and wreaks havoc.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> It is generally agreed upon that Mina, whom Berlioz originally named Ellimac ('Camille' spelt in reverse) was inspired by his unhappy affair with Camille Moke (later Pleyel). However, the Danish Mina also invites associations with another Scandinavian singer, Jenny Lind, whom Berlioz greatly admired.



## Synopsis

*The novella's plot unfolds through the letters of Xilef, a Euphonian composer on a musical journey in Italy, who reports back to his composer friend Shetland in Euphonia about the decadent musical culture in Italy. At the same time, Xilef phantasizes dramatically about his fiancée Mina, a brilliant but cold and distant singer whom Xilef suspects of capriciousness. In the ensuing, libretto-like scene, Mina reveals to her mother that she is bored with Xilef's monotonous letters, his possessiveness and continual Romantic rants. She decides to abandon him and travel to Euphonia incognito in order to sing at the Gluck festival, the most prestigious of all music festivals. Some time later, Shetland's letter tells Xilef of his miraculous encounter with the angelic singer Nadira who is now the most acclaimed singer in the city. In the meantime, Xilef has travelled the length and breadth of America in order to find Mina, who had pretended to go on tour. Having lost his social status in Euphonia, Xilef ultimately returns to the city only to find his lost fiancée as none other than Shetland's lover Nadira, now an acclaimed singer in Euphonia, yet who has already started being unfaithful to Shetland. In a vengeful rage, Xilef has Nadira/Mina crushed in a steel pavilion constructed to fold up on itself. After the tragedy, Xilef commits suicide and Shetland, who has gone mad, follows after a few days. The novella concludes with an image of silence that reigns over the once-musical city.*

While one may certainly read this novella as a belated literary transposition of Berlioz's bitterness and grudge towards Camille Pleyel, neither a biographical reading nor an exclusive focus on Berlioz's theme of revenge suffice to assess the novella's literary quality and its complex portrayal of musical utopia, artistic companionship and autonomy. Among the various musical characters, the most striking one is without doubt Mina/Nadira, the infamous singer, who betrays both male protagonists for the sake of self-validation and gratification, and whose betrayal causes their downfall as well as the destruction of the musical utopia that is Euphonia. But does Berlioz really portray her as a *femme fatale*, as a one-dimensional, monstrous prima donna devoid of any higher ideals and artistic merit and allows no other reading except that of the female musical threat, and the danger that is inherent in singer and song?<sup>151</sup>

Upon closer inspection, Mina appears first and foremost much more realistic than the two main protagonists Xilef and Shetland, who, not unlike other male characters discussed previously, are caught up in and eventually fall prey to their musical ideals,

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<sup>151</sup>See chapter 3.



including their idealizations of woman within the realm of music. Whereas Euphonia may well be a utopian place in terms of musical ethics, the two main composers distort this utopia just as much as Mina. Xilef's Romantic reverie, ominously evoking Mignon's lemon trees in bloom (a scene not devoid of Berliozian cynicism), and his obsession with his fiancée bode ill from the start, as does Shetland's idealization when he first perceives the singer high above the clouds, in the sublime setting of *Sphärenmusik*:

J'entends sortir d'un nuage, dont je longuais les contours, une voix de femme stridente, pure cependant, et dont l'agilité extraordinaire, dont les élans capricieux et les charmantes évolutions semblaient, en retentissant ainsi au milieu des airs, être le chant de quelque oiseau merveilleux et invisible [...] une jeune femme était debout à l'avant du navire, appuyée, dans une pose ravissante, sur une harpe dont, par intervalles, elle effleurait les cordes avec sa main droite étincelante de diamants.<sup>152</sup>

Berlioz makes it explicit that Mina/Nadira, in her harpist pose, is just as much a descendant of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century, post-Rousseauesque ideal of song and poetry as of the professional and potentially mundane singers of the July Monarchy, symbolised through her jewellery. He also suggests that her ambivalent nature, like her name, changes according to the male perspective. The composers' idealization of Mina/Nadira stylizes her according to feminine ideals and according to what each protagonist wishes to see in her, without actually developing an understanding of the singer herself, underneath the ideal. Thus, Mina is also the most complex character, whose behaviour challenges the male protagonists' one-dimensional, pre-conceived images of her. Whereas Xilef believes her to be a musically blasphemous diva, incapable of appreciating Beethoven, let alone Shetland's compositions, Mina decides to gain new ground and win over the Euphonians through her performance at the Gluck festival. While both composers remain attached to a fixed vision of the singer as a static ideal of musical femininity, and thus fail to evolve personally and artistically, Mina seeks personal and artistic change and growth. Not surprisingly, Berlioz develops her as the driving force in the plot, her actions advancing and stirring up the static nature of

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<sup>152</sup> OL I, pp.354-55.



Euphonia and its composers. Although Mina knows that her ‘betrayal’ will most likely cause a catastrophe, she is willing to face the consequences, almost ironically mocking Xilef’s romantic exaltation and his lack of realism: ‘D’ailleurs est-ce ma faute [...] si je ne l’aime plus! [...] Eh! Ma foi, qu’il s’arrange!’<sup>153</sup>

The same is true of her performance at the Gluck festival, where she poses as Nadira and converts herself into a true Euphonian singer, at first submitting to the city’s aesthetics and customs, then singing the *Alceste* aria and leading the congregation in a quasi-religious ceremony: ‘Hier encore, je n’étais qu’une femme vulgaire, douée d’une voix éclatante et agile, rien de plus. Le grand art ne m’avait point été révélé. [...] Je comprends maintenant, j’entends, je vis: je suis artiste’.<sup>154</sup> In this moment, Nadira almost threatens to overthrow Shetland’s patriarchal hierarchy, as the entire choir of Euphonia responds to her singing without needing any of the composers to conduct them. Nadira symbolically crowns Gluck’s bust as part of the festival, yet it is her whom the Euphonians venerate on that day. The musical ceremony is spontaneous and sublime, centred on the singer, which arouses Shetland’s enthusiasm about the musical scene and his passion for the singer, yet also triggers the onset of male jealousy, which inspires him to end Nadira’s scene and, silencing the singer, to symbolically re-establish the patriarchal order.

Shetland follows in Xilef’s footsteps as a jealous, obsessive lover who tries to live his passion for Nadira according to Romantic ideals of disembodied, artistic love: ‘Il n’y a plus de Nadira, Nadira c’est moi. Il n’y a plus de Shetland, Shetland c’est elle!’<sup>155</sup> However, Shetland is unable to accept this love as something more prosaic than *Künstlerliebe*. Upon declaring his love to the singer, his harp breaks, and when he proposes a love-suicide above the clouds, Nadira appears more pragmatic and attached to life – she turns out to be a mere mortal woman, belying Shetland’s ideal image of her:

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.353.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.358. The question is whether this is just another of the roles Mina performs.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p.360.

Nous touchions au seuil de l'autre vie; un seul pas, un seul acte de volonté, et nous pouvions le franchir! 'Nadira! lui dis-je, en l'étreignant sur mon cœur, - Cher! – Vois, il n'y a rien de plus pour nous en ce monde, nous sommes au faîte, redescendrons-nous? Mourons!' Elle me regarda d'un air surpris. 'Oui, mourons, ajoutai-je, jetons-nous embrassés hors du navire; nos âmes confondues dans un dernier baiser, s'exhaleront vers le ciel avant que nos corps, tourbillonnant dans l'espace, aient pu toucher de nouveau la prosaïque terre. Veux-tu? Viens! Plus tard, me répondit-elle, vivons encore! [...] Oh Nadira, ne serais-tu qu'une femme?'<sup>156</sup>

Ultimately, both Xilef and Shetland fail in their illusions about Mina/Nadira, who is perfectly capable of dissociating herself from her roles as a singer as well as from the ideal of femininity venerated by Xilef and Shetland, an aspect Berlioz toys with through her different aliases, showing that she identifies with more than the two composers' unrealistic concepts of art and love. This is a strong statement on artistic empowerment and agency; it seems that Berlioz sides more with this rogue singer than with the delusional composers who are fooled by their ideals and unable to reconcile their ideals in music and love with real life.<sup>157</sup> Both men withdraw from the final catastrophe of the destroyed musical ideal, Xilef by committing suicide, Shetland by going mad and dying shortly after: 'Shetland s'affaisse sur lui-même. En se relevant, il rit, il court éperdu au travers du jardin, chantant, appelant Nadira, cueillant des fleurs pour elle, gambadant: il est fou'.<sup>158</sup> In the end, the utopian musical city Euphonia has become a dystopia, where singing has turned to silence and the sublime musical harmony has turned into dissonance: 'Six mois après cette catastrophe, Euphonia encore en deuil était vouée au silence. L'orgue de la tour élevait seul au ciel d'heure en heure une lente harmonie dissonante, comme un cri de douleur épouvanté'.<sup>159</sup>

The often positive reading of Berlioz's novella, where *Euphonia* is supposed to represent Berlioz's musical ideals, remains questionable. As Nadira's Gluck performance shows, the mechanisms of this musical society are fragile and volatile, as

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.360-61.

<sup>157</sup> See Kolb, 'The Short Stories', p.149. In *Le suicide par enthousiasme*, the 12<sup>th</sup> orchestra evening, Berlioz dramatizes a similar problem in the Romantic artist-hero Adolphe, who withdraws from the incompatibility between real life and his ideals through suicide. Thus, the artist's suicide becomes synonymous with artistic and male impotence (Kolb, p.150).

<sup>158</sup> *OL I.*, p.377.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p.377.



is the strict, almost totalitarian order that reigns in the city, and which strangely juxtaposes the thousands of faceless Euphonians singing in tune with the two main composers, Xilef and Shetland, who appear oddly individualistic in the pathologically Romantic sense and who confuse their concepts of love with music in an ideal that turns out to be unliveable. Through the motif of the ‘weak’ Romantic artist hero, Berlioz perpetuates an ironic, even a critical position towards such Romantic ideals, a position shared to a certain extent by the authors discussed earlier, not only Hoffmann and Balzac but also Goethe, Staël and Fischer who debated the realistic implications of art.

In contrast to the fixed, morbid ideal, the woman singer appears as a foreign principle, a destructive principle for some, yet through her dynamics, her evolution and will to live, she also dominates and advances the plot. Mina may well be an echo of the author’s past disappointments; she may well be an unfaithful prima donna – at least this is one of the roles that Berlioz ascribes to her. But she is also the brilliant Gluck interpreter, able to win over Euphonia, able to be the ideal singer that Xilef and Shetland dream of, while avoiding identifying herself with such a fatal ideal. Much more than Xilef or Shetland, Mina appears an untamed, wild character, who may toy with musical conventions for a while (as shown during the Gluck festival) but whose artistic and personal drive is much too strong to be contained within a male-dominated, pre-conceived musical system – as such, she appears not that different from Berlioz himself, who liked to speak of himself as a savage, misunderstood yet above common musical categories.<sup>160</sup> It is telling that in the end, Nadira becomes a disembodied singer in the most brutal way imaginable: she does not die in the image of Romantic disembodiment and the paradigmatic ‘exhaustion’ of her song that I have discussed earlier as a crucial aspect of the singer’s fate, she is crushed to death in a pavilion, constructed by Xilef.<sup>161</sup> Nadira does not possess an inherent ‘flaw’ that would prompt her untimely death; rather, Nadira is the perfect singer who consciously destroys the ideal of female song (projected onto her) for the onlooking male artist. Detached from

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<sup>160</sup> See *CG* III, pp.546–47. Berlioz expresses a fantasy in the ideal of the ‘wild’, untamed woman (*OL* II, p.93).

<sup>161</sup> A scene that recalls a similar mechanical destruction, that of the automaton Olympia in Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*.

earlier ideals of female song as fragile or pathologic and thus as sublime and ethereal, her death comes in the most prosaic, mechanical form. Nadira is not a fragile singer bound to exhale her last breath, nor an ideal that quietly fades away at the hands of the male artist; rather, she needs to be killed off, and such a violent death confirms her status as a strong, autonomous artist who must be silenced by force, since she has made a mockery of musical and feminine ideals.

Although Berlioz initially envisaged entitling his work *Les Contes de l'orchestre*, the tone of *Euphonia* is darker than Hoffmann's tales, in the sense that Berlioz so starkly contrasts the musical utopia with its subversion at the hands of Mina, but also at the hands of the male protagonists themselves whose inability to reconcile love with their musical ideals results in revenge and death.

Yet the question remains whether this specific type of musical utopia that Berlioz conjures up is even a feasible ideal that a musician should strive for. As we have seen, despite his strong belief in musical education and his wish for a brotherhood of like-minded artists, Berlioz cannot help but make an equally strong case for the individual rogue musician who is just as close to his inner state of mind – and certainly closer to himself – than the Romantic echoes of the past. Xilef's and Shetland's illusions rewrite the plight of Krespel and Kreisler, of Stephani and Emilio Memmi, who all strive in vain to realize love and art within the idealized woman, an endeavour which is bound to fail because of the impossibility of such an unrealistic ideal. Beneath its veneer, Berlioz's musical utopia differs from the sublime *Geisterwelt* of Hoffmann's universe, since *Euphonia* is a static, non-evolving system which is brought down by a singer who does evolve and refuses to be confined to fixed, male-determined artistic categories, and who refuses to become either man's muse. Rewriting Hoffmann's singers, such as Antonie, Bettina and Julia in a much more reality-bound way, Berlioz makes a strong case for artistic agency during a time in French cultural history when singers were among the most fêted of all artists.

Not unlike Balzac, Berlioz thus implies that the 'real' musical sublime does not reside within static ideals of Romanticism and a fixed image like the idealized woman singer, unattainable in themselves, but within the individual artist's evolution, and her



ongoing quest for artistic creativity, a point which Caroline Auguste Fischer, to some extent, already made as well, and which equally resonates in an early archetype like Corinne. Berlioz crushes the static ideal of female song and contrasts it with the psychological and personal evolution of the autonomous artist, whose emancipatory flight can only be stopped by force. Finally, it appears that the concept of the Romantic singer as a passive character, confined to binary models of male-dominated musical-literary discourse cannot be upheld. This applies in particular, as this chapter has shown, to the works of male authors whose seemingly patriarchal treatment of singer and song reveals a much more complex, critical stance on ideals of music and femininity as part of a fluid, continuous literary discourse on the motif.

## Chapter 7

### **Realistic Expectations: The Singer in Female-Authored Texts of the July Monarchy (1830-1848)**

In the last chapter, I discussed the potential of singer and song as a carrier of female artistic empowerment specifically in male-authored works, and showed how far the woman singer in texts by Hoffmann, Balzac and Berlioz undermines the traditional reading of female passivity or threat. In this chapter, I shall move on to discuss the singer's potential in four female-authored case studies of the same period and show how the motif develops as part of a strong discourse on the liberated artist in general, in particular as part of a female writing tradition. Even more than their male colleagues, women authors are preoccupied with the key issues of female song outlined in earlier chapters and dramatize them as a *mise en corps* of female song, which explicitly focuses on the singer as heroine between ideal femininity and female artistic empowerment.

Sophie Ulliac-Trémadeure's *conte Emmeline, ou la jeune musicienne* (1836) treats a less poetic, yet crucial aspect of the singer in great detail: the issue of education and professionalism which, already hinted at by earlier authors, becomes increasingly important throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but remains compromised by female musical ideals and fantasies of the voice, which I discussed earlier.

As part of the general discussion surrounding the artist's special status in society, several texts dramatize the fate of the singer as well as the implications of female song as a sublime ideal that offers scope for the discussion of female agency: Madame de Taunay's novel *Une Cantatrice* (1841) and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's *Domenica* (1843), both of which coincided with George Sand's better-known epic *Consuelo / La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842/1844), preceded by her lesser-known novella *La Prima*



*Donna* (1831).<sup>1</sup> Written during the heyday of the *diva* and *prima donna* myth, these texts reiterate the critical reflection on the woman performer in terms of her artistic identity and professional vocation on the one hand, and her status as a musician-performer in society on the other, all the while rephrasing 18<sup>th</sup>-century ideals pertaining to music and song and thus the rift between a newly emancipated artist and her idealization.

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<sup>1</sup> While scholarship is available for music in the life and works of George Sand, it is as yet lacking for most of the women authors and their contribution to the musical-literary discourse that I focus on in this chapter. See Thérèse Marix-Spire, *Les Romantiques et la musique: le cas George Sand, 1804-1838* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1954); Alison Finch provides an overview of 19<sup>th</sup>-century women's writing: *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000). See also: Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *Un Autre Mal du siècle: le romantisme des romancières* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2005); Christine Planté, *La Petite Sœur de Balzac: essai sur la femme auteur* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). I shall deal with the specific case of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore later on in this chapter.

(1) Facing Reality: *Emmeline, ou la jeune musicienne*

C'est un titre assez bizarre que celui de *Contes aux jeunes Artistes* qu'a pris mademoiselle Ulliac.<sup>2</sup>

Although little-known today, Sophie Ulliac was a prominent writer during her time who maintained her place in literary history throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Starting her career as a translator,<sup>4</sup> she adapted trivial stories and romances from German and English and went on to make her reputation as the author of moral and educational texts. During the 1830s and 1840s, her most productive period, she gained acclaim as one of the finest writers of children's literature in France.<sup>5</sup>

In her popular anthology *Contes aux jeunes artistes*,<sup>6</sup> frequently republished during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sophie Ulliac explores selected artistic professions: *Léon, ou le jeune graveur*; *Valérie, ou la jeune artiste*;<sup>7</sup> *Prosper, ou le jeune sculpteur* and finally, *Emmeline, ou la jeune musicienne*. Although these tales, aimed at a younger audience may suggest simplicity, they explore realistic career possibilities in the arts, with the author's moralistic style emphasizing the educational and realistic implications of an artistic education, an approach that appears worth investigating.

The *contes* did raise eyebrows among critics; although the *Revue critique*'s reviewer generally favoured Sophie Ulliac, he regarded with suspicion the potential danger of educational literature encouraging young, impressionable readers to pursue the superficial, gratuitous glory of being an artist. As I showed in chapter 2, women's education, especially in the arts, was a widely discussed and ideologically controversial

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<sup>2</sup> *Revue critique des livres nouveaux*, 4 (1836), p.37.

<sup>3</sup> Sophie Ulliac-Trémadeure (1794-1862), a Britton, who is alternatively listed with the pseudonym Dudrezène or simply Ulliac.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest reference listed by the BNF is Ulliac's translation of the German trivial author August Lafontaine (1758-1831): *La Petite Harpiste, ou l'Amour au Mont-Géant* [*Die Harfenistin, oder die Liebe auf dem Riesengebirge*]... avec deux romances imitées du texte allemand par Mme Victoire Babois (Paris, 1816).

<sup>5</sup> *Revue critique des livres nouveaux*, 12 (1844), p.390.

<sup>6</sup> *Contes aux jeunes artistes* (Paris: Didier, 1836).

<sup>7</sup> Valérie is an aspiring writer, similar to another of Ulliac's protagonists: *Emilie, ou la jeune fille auteur. Ouvrage dédié aux jeunes personnes* (Paris: Didier, 1837).



topic and continued to divide public opinion throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Especially in the case of the woman singer, it seems that the issue of education is eclipsed by the character's strong associations with the ideals pertaining to women and music, and the dogma of the 'natural' (i.e. untrained and unspoiled) singer which resonated in the previous case studies. In that light, Ulliac's *Emmeline* gives out an almost revolutionary message.

### Synopsis

*Emmeline Adelmond, a well-bred girl with musical talent, is faced with the difficulty of having to support her family after her mother's financial and social ruin. Encouraged by the family's wise, moral friend, M. Derville, who had long criticized the girl's vanity and shallow nature, Emmeline embarks on an apprenticeship in music. Developing her skills through private tuition, Emmeline passes the entrance exam to the Paris Conservatoire where she goes on to receive her degree in order to become a music teacher. During her studies, Emmeline is confronted with different musical possibilities and tempted by the glamorous lifestyle that she could lead as a prima donna. When she wins the annual Conservatoire prize in three categories, the first student to do so, she is admired and envied by everyone, only to find herself slandered to the point of losing some of her students. Her reaction is an immediate retreat from the public sphere. The conte concludes with Emmeline's retreat into a modest, yet relatively stable, existence as wife, mother and music teacher.*

The novella itself shows clear links with the German *Bildungsroman* tradition and emerging realist tendencies in France. As such, *Emmeline* dramatizes the coming-of-age of a spoiled, misled young girl who, through a rigorous musical apprenticeship, comes to terms with reality and finds a decent place in society.

It is through music that the protagonist reaches not only artistic, but more importantly, personal and moral maturity, while at the same time saving her family from financial ruin and social stigma. Commonplaces associated with female song are undeniable, such as Emmeline's superb voice and musical talent, as well as the implicit dangers that bestrew the career of the professional woman musician, yet these are

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<sup>8</sup> Another notable working woman of that time, the *institutrice* was a highly debated character. See chapter 2, n.73.

counterbalanced by the girl's strenuous and focussed journey towards financial and moral agency, and her efforts to become a conscientious and 'good' woman and daughter and to make amends for her earlier capriciousness as a vain, self-centred salon girl.

Elle avait une voix superbe; elle en était fière et elle la travaillait avec plaisir. Cette voix remarquable avait déjà inspiré un poète; une romance avait été dédiée à Emmeline, et jamais on ne s'adressait vainement à son amour-propre. Plaire et briller, briller et plaire, attirer les yeux par sa figure, par sa toilette, par ses talents, c'était le but unique de ses pensées et de ses désirs.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the status and function of music in the novella, Emmeline's musical apprenticeship which, taking up the major part of the narration, is described in detail as a painful, cathartic experience for the former salon girl who is gradually transformed from a muse into a hard-working professional – a rigorously structured process further emphasized by the author's meticulous, detailed account of the girl's apprenticeship. Although earlier authors, like Fischer or Sophie Mereau, depict female musical apprenticeship, Sophie Ulliac breaks new ground with her music novella in which the relationship between woman and music radically turns away from more idealistic stereotypes towards a rationalistic, measured documentary of professionalization.

Music does not entirely lose its poetic quality, as it still acts as a consolation for the girl; yet the reverie, the poetry and emotional gratification that Emmeline experiences when performing are inseparably linked with the utility of her musical practice and to the realistic purpose her studies need to fulfil. A serious music student, Emmeline has neither the time nor the social or financial status to allow herself to get lost in the pose of the singing muse or to dwell on romances written in her honour. Rather, the emotional catharsis triggered by music serves to strengthen her in her pursuits as well as in her allegiance to her mother, which defines her explicitly altruistic identity as an artist: 'C'était dans de semblables moments qu'Emmeline se sentait artiste!'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Emmeline, ou la jeune musicienne* (Paris: Didier, 1836), pp.11-12 (hereafter *Emmeline*).

<sup>10</sup> *Emmeline*, pp.43-44.



During her quasi-religious exercise in self-discipline, piety and musical mastery, Emmeline has to navigate the dangers that song and a certain type of singing career pose for her. Contrary to previous case studies where female song constituted a key element of female self-expression, Emmeline's song requires careful guidance and restraint: while her beautiful voice is an indispensable prerequisite allowing her to study music, she is constantly tempted by the danger of the opera singer's career, which initially appears as a logical continuation of her *girling* in the salons and revelling in her vanity. Securing a contract as a court singer or as a theatrical performer is the most coveted career path for the Conservatoire's voice students, and Emmeline, one of the most talented and studious of her class, is sorely tempted by this option:

Et l'âme d'Emmeline se révoltait contre la rigueur de sa destinée; et elle prêtait une oreille avide aux récits qui souvent étaient faits autour d'elle, de la brillante fortune de quelque compagne qui avait été engagée comme cantatrice, pour la chapelle d'un prince étranger. Emmeline se disait que cette carrière, plus honorable que celle du théâtre, donnait au moins la liberté de travailler, et, en assurant l'existence, permettait de se livrer uniquement à l'étude et d'abandonner les écolières.<sup>11</sup>

Resisting the temptation to become a *cantatrice* turns out to be the true moral test for Emmeline who has to choose the right type of feminine, moral musicianship. Ulliac operates a very clear two-class system as to what is an appropriate sphere for women musicians, and she does so much less subtly than earlier authors who either implied the legitimacy of the stage singer (Fischer, Hoffmann, Balzac and Berlioz) or included the problematic status of public female performance in more general issues related to the female voice and the ideal of female song and poetry (Goethe, Staël). Compared to previous case studies, Ulliac, if anyone, comes closest to Madame de Staël's understanding of the stage performer as a problematic figure indissolubly tied to the female character's decline. In comparison, Ulliac dismisses the stage career clearly, if not bluntly: If the hard-earned, quiet existence of the music teacher is portrayed as being more 'real' than decent, the illustrious life of the *actrice*, i.e. of the singer who performs on stage and in front of a paying audience, is the epitome of falsity, obscenity

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.366.

and decadence, appearing as a nightmarish distortion of the attention Emmeline received as a salon dilettante:

Madame Adelmond nourrissait, contre la vie de théâtre, des préjugés qui prennent leur source dans des sentiments de pudeur et de raison trop bien fondées pour qu'on puisse désirer de les voir s'effacer tous. Emmeline, d'ailleurs, qui passait maintenant une grande partie de ses journées au Conservatoire, avait sous les yeux des preuves bien multipliées que l'existence des artistes est un mélange bizarre où le faux l'emporte sur le vrai; aussi s'affligeait-elle en se voyant confondue peut-être, dans l'opinion publique, avec quelques-unes de ces femmes légères au moins, chez qui l'idée de vertu est tellement subordonnée à une foule d'autres toutes contraires, que cette idée disparaît aisément, et parfois sans retour. Une chose encore la choquait, c'était le ton cavalier des hommes, des amateurs de musique qui venaient papillonner autour de ces jeunes filles, dont la plupart se destinaient au théâtre. Emmeline était trop jolie pour ne pas attirer les regards; son air de réserve la rendait même plus piquante encore: mais on voyait promptement que *la prude*, c'est ainsi que ses compagnes et tous les élèves la nommaient, n'était pas *abordable*.<sup>12</sup>

Emmeline nevertheless dreams about the eccentric, illustrious lives that opera singers lead and to which her fellow students aspire, but she knows that choosing the career of the *cantatrice* would inevitably disgrace her in the eyes of her mother and irrevocably cause her misery. In this aspect, Ulliac shows much more clearly than other authors discussed so far that she is conscious of the socio-cultural polemics and fantasies surrounding the public singer and that she crafts her musician as a counter-figure to the perceived immorality and frivolity of the singer, which Emmeline must repudiate. Further admonished by her friend Derville,<sup>13</sup> Emmeline slowly comes to terms with her duties as a good musician and daughter:

Emmeline sentait bien quelle était la résolution qu'elle devait prendre; mais aujourd'hui elle trouvait trop obscure la renommée de simple professeur, et malgré elle, elle soupirait chaque fois que, dans les concerts où madame Lebrun, qui l'aimait beaucoup, la conduisait souvent, elle était témoin de l'admiration, de l'enthousiasme excité par une belle voix, des hommages dont les cantatrices célèbres étaient l'objet; et elle se figurait le plaisir qu'il devait y avoir à voyager précédée par l'éclat d'un beau nom, accueillie partout avec ivresse, fêtée, recherchée, encensée [...] Comprenant enfin l'étendue de ses devoirs, elle se résigna et elle sentit qu'il fallait terminer cette année même son éducation musicale, afin d'être libre de se livrer aux travaux bien moins

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.148.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.369.



attrayants qu'exige la carrière de professeur. Dans cette carrière obscure, elle pouvait enfin se distinguer, former des élèves qui lui feraient honneur, et assurer à sa mère une vieillesse heureuse.<sup>14</sup>

Emmeline's voice is beautiful and an important prerequisite for her admission to a musical education, yet it becomes a less important skill during her studies, as her focus is on becoming a proper music teacher of voice and piano equally, and eventually composing.

Again, we find here a clear digression from my other case studies in that Ulliac de-emphasizes the female singing voice in view of the woman musician's more important duties as a good woman and conscientious artist – in that, she has more in common with the aesthetic and socio-cultural backdrop discussed in chapters 2 and 3 than other authors of her time. Ulliac reconnects with the Rousseauesque double-bind of female song and the inherent threat of female musicality that needs to be contained, as female musical practice needs to be monitored. Thus, female song and its expression through the profession of singer takes the form of a potentially dangerous, morally corrupting force which needs to be controlled and channelled into the right type of art practice. In her argument, Ulliac also appears surprisingly stricter than some of the male authors discussed so far. The notion of *cantatrice* possesses neither artistic merit nor aesthetic value, but is presented as a seemingly easy shortcut to financial security without the hardship and daily hassle of teaching, and above all to social admiration and a glamorous lifestyle. A mere fantasy, song thus becomes void of realistic life prospects to the point of posing a threat to the singer's integrity. Emmeline is put to the test when her friend Armande leaves her mother for an engagement as a court singer in Russia – which is not per se a bad prospect, but which obviously exposes Armande as a careless, immoral daughter. Tempted and jealous though she is, Emmeline remains faithful to her commitment towards her mother, proving her worth as she ultimately cares for Armande's mother as well, and again counterbalancing the moral ambiguity of her profession with her worth as an angelic, caring creature.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.370.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.379.

Although Emmeline possesses the necessary talent and education to succeed as a *cantatrice* (and is theoretically free to choose her career) this specific type of female musicianship is, due to its social and moral implications, inappropriate and unacceptable. Ulliac exposes the dangers of the singer's public life under the scrutiny of a volatile audience and subject to the games of courting and patronage in a merciless music business ruled by envy and intrigues:

L'homme seul peut impunément aspirer à tous les genres de gloire; la femme qui se respecte et veut être respectée, doit les craindre tous. Emmeline venait d'apprendre ce que valait cette obscurité qu'elle avait jadis dédaignée; et elle ne se montrait que chez ses élèves et chez ses amis; et elle éloignait avec effroi tout ce qui aurait pu rappeler des triomphes, si cruellement et si promptement empoisonnés.<sup>16</sup>

No matter how modest and morally irreproachable a woman artist may be, Emmeline has to learn that there is no guarantee that she will remain unscathed in the public eye. This is not so much a disappointing denouement on the part of the author as it is factual; underneath the *conte*'s conservative morality lies a carefully constructed realistic scenario of the situation of a female musician during Ulliac's time, when public opinion was volatile and gossip frequent, and when the singer's public image was impossible to control – a fact which, paradoxically added to the creation of the prima donna myth.

If Emmeline is neither a muse nor a genius she represents a pertinent example of possible female musicianship and its implications: Sophie Ulliac's novella is the constant admonition for a woman artist to work harder than her female and male peers, while still suffering from public disapproval and having to think further than just the superficial glory of the prima donna. Moreover, Ulliac's musician overcomes the ideal of the salon singer and poetic muse, whose vanity and shallowness are both nurtured by Romantic poems dedicated to her and her own showcases, and the fantasy of the opera singer and the fake glamour associated with her life. None of these simplistically drawn images can adequately portray the woman musician and the realistic implications of her

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.378-79.



profession defined by a long apprenticeship, hard work and financial hardship to which female music teachers were especially vulnerable. As such, Emmeline is, on the one hand, a female musician who, through hard work, dedication and a sense of moral obligation, rises above the stereotype of the domestic, well-bred woman who sings and plays the piano, but also above the stereotype of the female voice as muse and the fantasy of the woman singer and operatic diva, as portrayed by many texts of the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Ulliac takes a clear, moralistic stand and fails to address the potential and the positive sides of the stage singer who, as we have seen in other texts, can also serve as an example of female study and work ethics.

In comparison with earlier models of song, there is little mystery, little poetry left in the music teacher Emmeline – yet she is an important type of singer, too, as through her the author shows a legitimate, feasible way for women to pursue music professionally and establish themselves as respectable working women in society, a facet that, if not untreated, was nevertheless left underdeveloped in texts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Sophie Ulliac's musician would have made a valuable addition to and fitted well among the different types of working women portrayed in the satirical sociological study *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, counterbalancing the biased view of women artists advanced by the sarcastic articles on the *Figurante* and the *Cantatrice de Salon*.<sup>18</sup> Despite her shortcomings and her overall conservative, moralistic tone, Ulliac shows an interesting, unorthodox proposition through her demystification of poetry and female song ideals and the realism of a musical career for a middle-class woman whose concern is far less with the poetic quality of song than with moving up the social ladder. The *Revue Critique*'s review of Ulliac's work articulates the unease that contemporary intellectuals certainly felt when faced with such a bold and realistic proposal for women to educate themselves professionally as musicians and still claim their place as members of the *juste-milieu*.

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Alfred Dessessarts, 'La Chanteuse des rues', *L'Artiste*, 4 (1832), 67-69; Guy d'Agde, 'Une Cantatrice italienne', *L'Artiste*, 5 (1833), 77-80; Louis de Maynard, 'Notre ami le juste milieu', *RDP*, 20 (August 1835), 84-110.

<sup>18</sup> See L. Couailhac, 'La Mère d'actrice'; Philibert Audebran, 'La Figurante'; Maurice de Flassan, 'La Cantatrice de salon', in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1841), I, pp.75-89; I, pp.413-20; II, pp.201-208.



## (2) The Prima Donna Question

As we have seen, the topic on which Sophie Ulliac displays considerable unease is the prima donna, the iconic archetype of 19<sup>th</sup> century musical culture who best embodies the professional and mythical side of female song, all the while continuing the Staëlian polemics of the performing heroine. Ulliac upholds her singer in terms of educational or moral values, but nevertheless carefully navigates the fantasy of the prima donna and thus of female song at its most performative. She naturally counterbalances the portrait of her studious musician Emmeline with her fellow student Armande who, a true, immoral diva, leaves her mother behind for a career as an *actrice* and court singer – which in turn further highlights Emmeline's moral and musical purity. Ulliac aims to legitimise the singer through a carefully constructed vision of female song that contrasts with the *actrice* and her implications of worldly glamour and immorality. Furthermore, Ulliac ignores the dichotomy of song poetics and performance in order to focus exclusively on the music teacher in her social and economic dimension. In that regard, the author somewhat regresses compared to her male contemporaries, who created legitimate singers as stage performers who displayed a surprising potential for artistic agency and integrity; but Ulliac also differs from earlier writers like Fischer, Goethe and Staël for whom the performance of singer and song always plays a central role.

Although treated by previous authors, the prima donna comes into her own during the 1830s and 1840s as a character who synthesizes and represents the culmination of the diverging aspects of female song that have been discussed so far, drawing on a long tradition of female song, between ideal and performance, as well as constituting an entirely new breed of performing artist who sings with a claim to publicity, critical acclaim and artistic sublimity. The literature of the 1830s and 1840s develops this potential and explores the prima donna's body, voice and poetics; as shown in chapters 2 and 3, the singer incarnates a bourgeois fantasy and an ideal of femininity that any woman regardless of talent and social standing aspires to incarnate. Yet these trivia camouflage a more problematic side to the female musician who struggles to break loose from traditional binary models of femininity that opposed the good and the bad



singer and by extension, acceptable and condemnable models of femininity. On the one hand, the *cantatrice* occupied one of the few places available for women artists in the July Monarchy, and in that regard partook in the cult surrounding the sublimated (male) artist of French Romanticism:<sup>19</sup> ‘Si l’artiste est roi, le chanteur est un dieu’.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, as we have seen earlier, this cult of the artist is always expressed differently for women, and continues the problem of female musical ambivalence, and the reconciliation between ideal femininity and female artistic agency.

The prima donna offers scope for a serious literary discussion of female artistry and, in this chapter, of a female literary discourse that uses the singer as the text’s heroine, and explores the dichotomy of female ideal and performance in greater depth. The following case studies of George Sand, Madame Taunay and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore show the singer as a vehicle for a renewed questioning of woman and artist, constructing the female singing voice as a strong statement within their narrative discourse, thus re-writing the myth of female song and attenuating the stereotypical extremes that often threaten the literary depiction of the singer.

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<sup>19</sup> See Paul Bénichou, *Romantismes français*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Maurice Shroder, *Icarus. The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Guichard, p.86. While Guichard uses the male term ‘chanteur’ he clearly identifies song and singer as female prerogatives.

## Hoffmannesque Echoes: George Sand, *La Prima Donna*

Son nom partait de toutes les bouches accompagné des épithètes de *diva*, de *benedetta*.<sup>21</sup>

Before undertaking her *opus summum* *Consuelo*, George Sand reflected on the prima donna question through a *conte* of the same name. Published in the *Revue de Paris* not long after Balzac's *Sarrasine*, *La Prima Donna* displays an equally compelling treatment of the female singing voice as well as distinctly Hoffmannesque undertones.

### Synopsis

*On the eve of the homecoming of Gina, once the foremost soprano in Verona, the narrator encounters the German Valterna who relates the dramatic background to Gina's resumption of her career. Acclaimed by all and a singer of absolute genius and sublimity, Gina compromised her life and career on stage by agreeing to marry an older aristocrat. The singer's marriage ended her career and caused her immediate physical and mental decline into madness. The conte concludes with the narrator witnessing Gina's return to the stage and her performance in Zingarelli's *Giulietta e Romeo*. Performing after years of withdrawal due to ill health, Gina experiences the renewal of artistic sublimity and transcendence but, while in character, dies on stage, only to be followed by Valterna who witnesses the scene: 'Tant d'émotions longtemps perdues, longtemps désirées, retrouvées et senties avec tant de puissance, avaient brisé ce corps épuisé de maladie. Gina était morte aux accords suaves et religieux de Zingarelli, au milieu du dernier et du plus beau de ses triomphes'.*<sup>22</sup>

Amid the many trivial depictions of singers in contemporary journals, the quality of Sand's *conte* lies in the development of her opera singer as a strong Romantic artist who faces an existentialist struggle within her intrinsically artistic nature: Gina draws her existence from music and from the stage, and in this, she is depicted as a figure of superior, musical genius who incarnates song as she communicates it to her listeners,

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<sup>21</sup> 'La Prima Donna', *RDP*, 25 (April 1831), p.234 (hereafter *La Prima Donna*). While George Sand was officially collaborating with Jules Sandeau at the time, scholarship gives the major credit for this *conte* to George Sand.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.248.



causing them to experience a quasi-religious rapture and transcendence. Sand develops Gina both as a musical-feminine ideal and as a fully-fledged performer who is unanimously accepted and acclaimed and thus not in the least concerned with the implication of female musical ambivalence. Sand casts her as a legitimate representative of sublime art, exerting her musical powers on the audience: ‘Voix du ciel; voix de l’enfer, remuant tous les cœurs, vibrant dans toutes les âmes, les rafraîchissant de suaves mélodies, ou les torturant sans pitié d’accents cruels et déchirants [...] la foule était là sans force, sans voix, osant à peine aspirer l’air [...]’.<sup>23</sup>

The male protagonist, Valterna, emphasizes this very strong position of the singer in the text. He sympathizes with Gina’s plight through his own suffering and madness to the point of following her into death. Despite his privileged status as narrator, he is not a typical male protagonist who either remains an outsider to the mystery of music and song or whose fixation on the female singing voice threatens to appropriate it for his own purpose, but rather he acts as the prima donna’s mouthpiece, rendering her pain even more visible, and providing the narrative shape for her swansong, entirely accepting and glorifying the singer herself and her art as well as synchronizing his own physical, mental and emotional state of mind with hers:<sup>24</sup>

C’était mon existence à moi, et elle m’apparut, bienfait et bénédiction! Et ma vie s’alluma à son regard, et mon âme engourdie et triste se réveilla enthousiaste et forte aux accents enchanteurs de sa voix. [...] C’était comme une religion que je portais dans mon cœur, une religion à laquelle je vouais la vie qu’elle m’avait donnée.<sup>25</sup>

The drama of the singer’s fate derives from Gina’s conscious compromising of her artistic identity through marriage. Trying to integrate herself into upper-class society as the wife of a count (who, quite typically, had acquired the singer’s hand as part of a bet

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>24</sup> Sand thus both rewrites the motif of the ‘weak’ male character, as seen in Balzac and Berlioz and proposes a different constellation between female artist and male spectator than for example Staël, or Fischer in *Der Günstling*. On the character of the male narrator, see David A. Powell, ‘Nous et eux : Le narrateur français dans un texte italien: *La Prima donna*’, in *Le Chantier de George Sand/George Sand et l’étranger: Actes du X<sup>e</sup> Colloque International George Sand*, ed. Tivadar Gorilovics/Anna Szabó (Debrecen, Hungary: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, 1993), pp.285-93.

<sup>25</sup> *La Prima Donna*, p.238. Sand later expresses a similar religious veneration towards Pauline Viardot (see chapter 6, p.186).

with his friends), she violates the foremost rule of artistic genius. Contrary to other singers who face the insoluble conflict between artistic self-expression and the desire to love, Gina radically betrays herself and the sacredness of her art not for the sake of love, but for blasphemous reasons, namely her own illusions about the existence of a respectable woman of society. George Sand was certainly well aware of the socio-cultural implications of the woman artist, especially the woman singer, but her focus is fixed on the artist more than on the woman. Consequently, the narration pays little attention to the socio-cultural and moral implications of Gina's status and her reasons for marrying, but instead focuses on the direct consequences for the artist herself:

Ne me demandez pas les raisons qui la déterminèrent à échanger son bonheur contre un titre et de l'opulence; je les ai toujours ignorées. Pensa-t-elle s'élever plus haut dans l'opinion en joignant un faux éclat à tant d'éclat solide et réel dont l'entourait son talent? Eut-elle la faiblesse de se croire au-dessous de ces femmes qui l'applaudissaient tout haut, et qui l'enviaient en secret? Hélas! elle était plus qu'elles toutes; elle préféra devenir la dernière d'entre elles.<sup>26</sup>

Gina's existential purgatory sets in as a direct response to her error in dishonouring her gift and compromising the realism of her existence, lured by the false glamour of the upper classes. Sand is uninterested in offering escape routes to her artist by exploring the possibilities of a binary, traditional concept of femininity (and its implications like salon musical practice or motherhood) – she avoids the double-bind of the woman-artist and discusses Gina exclusively as an artist who has failed. Sand refrains from passing moral judgment on her singer but concentrates on the artist's inner conflict and her coming to terms with her own betrayal. In conclusion, there can be no compromise for Sand's singer, such as domestic musical practice or teaching, let alone the ideal of 'natural' song which could help Gina regain inner harmony. On the contrary, Sand creates this type of 'natural' female music as the singer's very own purgatory. In a key scene secretly witnessed by Valterna, Gina re-enacts the role of Desdemona in her garden: singing in a natural setting which appears as a nightmarish

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239.



distortion of Italian poetic utopia, Gina no longer differentiates between herself and the role, nor does her voice follow regular patterns of vocal harmony:

L'herbe fléchit en criant; un frôlement de robe agita le feuillage, et à travers les citronniers et les myrtes je vis Gina, [...] d'une voix triste et plaintive, elle chanta la romance *du Saule*: c'était Desdemona, la Desdemona de Shakespeare; mélancolique comme la nuit qui semblait gémir avec elle, pressentant sa terrible destinée, la prédisant dans chacun de ses accents, la racontant dans chacun de ses regards. Je l'écoutais dans une muette extase; tout à coup elle poussa un cri délirant, et je frissonnai. [...] Pauvre Vénitienne, il faut mourir. – Mourir! et elle fuyait, pâle, les yeux égarés, sublime de peur, et au moment où l'amour de la vie déployait dans toute sa vigueur la puissante énergie de ses moyens, au moment où sa voix poignait l'âme de toute l'harmonie déchirante de ses accents, elle s'arrêta, comme frappée d'une commotion électrique, le regard fixe, le cou tendu, immobile et froide comme une statue.<sup>27</sup>

Her agony progresses as Gina distorts her craft in the salons; projecting her voice into the emptiness of her villa or into the hostile landscape of her gardens, Gina literally sings herself to madness, denying any kind of compromise for her song and deriding the ideal of a woman's 'natural' song as a harmonious extension of her inner self that serves no genuine artistic purpose. Gina's song does not so much address the question of 'female song' as that of 'song' as an absolute category, an art form that has been compromised. Through the exclusiveness of her art as well as the importance of the right context of performance, the character of Gina bears similarities to early archetypes like Mignon – however, in contrast to Mignon, Gina's singing is communicable to her listeners and destined for performance in a public context where it reaches its full potential. Coupling the prima donna persona with the concept of artistic genius, Sand stages Gina as a legitimate artist who belongs nowhere but on stage. Gina appears as a demiurge who transcends her audience and shapes contemporary musical culture – situated in the realm of artistic genius, Gina's preaching to her audience reformulates Mignon's and Corinne's songs as a message of sublime female music which actually works: 'Son apparition apportait dans le cœur comme un souvenir des mélodies du ciel.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.242-43.

[...] Dans tout le cours de la pièce, exaltée par les applaudissements frénétiques, elle s'éleva au-dessus de tout ce que l'Italie avait produit de génie et de mélodie'.<sup>28</sup>

The narration sharply contrasts the singer's extraordinary constitution with the harmful environment of society, in which, nourished by the wrong type of (literally constrictive) air, her surreal voice turns into mere screams. Neither salon music nor the search for music in nature alleviates the mental distress of a singer who appears larger than the life to which she has confined herself.

Le luxe et l'opulence ne lui allaient pas; il fallait à ses larges poumons un air et plus âpre et plus libre. Ses joues se cavèrent, et ses grands yeux bleus se marbrèrent de noir. [...] En vain chercha-t-elle à vaincre cette rêverie amère qui la consumait; en vain essaya-t-elle des chants vifs et joyeux; si elle venait à laisser courir ses doigts sur le piano, si elle forçait sa voix à des mesures vives et pressées, bientôt seule au milieu de la foule étonnée, elle revenait aux noires pensées qui l'assiégeaient sans cesse, ses doigts erraient lentement sur les touches plaintives, sa voix s'affaiblissait, des phrases d'une harmonie poignante sortaient sourdement de sa poitrine, et les chants commencés dans la joie allaient mourir dans la douleur.<sup>29</sup>

Sand increasingly dramatizes the psychopathological aspect of Gina's voice as a punishment for betraying her artistic identity, preparing the singer for her inevitable physical and mental degradation and the symbolic destruction of her vocal harmony, leaving nothing but disharmonious screams and ultimately silence.

On dit que parfois, lorsque ses chants avaient cessé, ses yeux inquiets et hagards semblaient interroger la foule; qu'elle répondait par un long cri au silence de mort qui régnait autour d'elle, et qu'elle tombait alors, froide comme la pierre qu'allait frapper sa tête échevelée.<sup>30</sup>

In the conclusion of her *conte*, Sand celebrates the apotheosis of the singer and her voice with the culmination of Gina's triumphal re-integration into her original sphere. Her quest for freedom and for authentic, sublime self-expression as well as her death in the happiest moment of her performance is not unlike Antonie's fate in *Rat Krespel*.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.245, 247.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.239/240.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.241.



Gina's death is preceded by an almost erotic vocal and artistic transcendence during which she experiences her own genius as a voice which is not her own but seems to animate her from the outside, an image drawing on the notion of genius as embracing both male and female qualities, as well as on the paradigmatic dissociation of singer and voice. Gina experiences a utopian, androgynous voice that not only renders her performance sublime but unmistakably marks her body as redundant and incapable of being sustained any longer: 'Surprise elle-même de la puissance de ses moyens, elle dit à Rosetta, dans le dernier entr'acte, qu'il lui semblait qu'une autre voix que la sienne, une voix magique, s'exhalait, mâle et pleine, de ses poumons élargis'.<sup>31</sup>

Like other singers discussed earlier, Gina experiences the important transcendence of her physical being through art, and ultimately, this supremacy expressed through her genius can only be achieved through physical death, and through the impossible mixture of masculine and feminine traits. Can the opera singer survive beyond the end of the song and beyond the ideals associated with the musician? Can the woman singer actually sustain the originality, the limitlessness and supremacy implied by artistic genius? In this early novella at least, George Sand avoids a lengthy negotiation of the question and breaks off with her heroine's death, which clearly echoes the Hoffmannesque heroine whose death coincides with the expression of utmost musical sublimity. While this abrupt dramatic end is undoubtedly playing with the archetype of the morbid, degenerating prima donna, the conclusive scene equally constitutes a glorification of the absolute artist Gina, for whom there can be no distinction between imagination and reality, between the stage and the 'real world' and between herself as a performer of music and the divine ideal of music that is generated through her, yet in turn generates her. Sand's prima donna demands respect for the singer and her art, but more importantly Sand demands respect from the artist for herself and her profession without apologizing for or compromising her status as a fully-fledged artist. A fact she underlines through her inversion of ideal and reality. The author's great merit is her

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.248. This constitutes the irreconcilable conflict between an ideal sound and its physical, mechanical execution through the *mise-en-corps* in a female singer which is bound to fail and therefore results in the destruction of the singing body.

affirmative establishment of the singer as diva and prima donna in the proper sense of the term: the singer is a legitimate performer of both music incarnate and artistic genius. Additionally, in a small yet important sub-plot the author establishes a female artistic lineage through the contralto Rosetta who was carefully groomed by Gina to succeed her on stage and who, in the role of Romeo, is the one to bury the prima donna in her coffin.<sup>32</sup> Despite its finally tragic outcome, this climactic scene echoes the positive, promising message, already voiced in *Corinne*, of a symbolic artistic motherhood and female lineage that undermines the dichotomy of nature and art and, to some extent, of (biological) femaleness and (aesthetic) femininity. Thus, taking a strong position on the prima donna's agency, George Sand's *conte* must be considered a landmark in the writing about the woman singer during French Romanticism, while at the same time preparing the ground for Sand's greater works to come, most importantly her singer epic *Consuelo*.

### Trivial Surprises: Madame Taunay, *Une Cantatrice*

Madame Taunay's apprenticeship novel *Une cantatrice* (1841) was published during the heyday of music literature in France, alongside other singer novels that are far more well-known today, like *Domenica* and *Consuelo*.<sup>33</sup> Although Madame Taunay probably followed contemporary taste for the popular motif of the prima donna, her treatment of the topic is, despite undeniably trivial tones, surprisingly unorthodox and somewhat emancipatory.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As a contralto, Rosetta prefigures the vocal profile of Sand's later character Consuelo.

<sup>33</sup> Madame Taunay was the wife of Hippolyte Taunay, painter and writer, who translated Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* and wrote books about Brazil, where he lived from 1816-1821. Like many of her contemporaries, Madame Taunay attained notoriety during the July Monarchy, publishing a number of novels and obtaining the Prix Montyon for her work *Vertus du peuple* (1842).

<sup>34</sup> Bailbé dedicates a lengthier-than-usual comment to this novel (*Le Roman et la musique*, pp.207-11).



## Synopsis

*Une cantatrice follows the fate of Floretta Bonucci, the illegitimate daughter of an Italian musician in Paris and his housekeeper Giovanina. A musical genius, Floretta endures her father's gruelling musical training with the result that, at the age of twelve, when her voice already spans all ranges from bass to soprano, she is able to assist with her father's teaching. After her father's death, Floretta is revealed to Parisian musical circles who support her career and help her achieve acclaim as an opera singer in France and Italy. Having fallen in love with her father's student Albert de Fargueil, Floretta learns to emancipate herself from this emotional bond, which caused her nothing but grief, since the aristocrat Albert considered her socially beneath him. In her quest for personal and artistic agency, Floretta is supported by a fatherly friend, the Englishman Sir Adenkton, whose eventual suicide determines Floretta to break off contact with Albert for ever and to live her life alone, as an acclaimed singer.*

The novel's central plot dramatizes the singer's coming-of-age, her personal, emotional and artistic emancipation amidst an array of stereotypical 'singer problems'. Through her emancipation, Floretta ultimately becomes a fully-fledged prima donna. Underneath the light narrative style, Floretta is in fact depicted as a strong and independent artist who, through the hardship of musical apprenticeship and her precocious genius, rises to become an acclaimed stage performer.

Mais c'est à la nature seule qu'elle doit son plus grand mérite, mérite immense déjà et qui chaque jour se développe d'une manière remarquable [...] D'une étude régulière et progressive, elle passe à une improvisation qui, malgré de nombreuses fautes, dénote un génie prêt à se produire en brisant, avec une heureuse hardiesse, jusqu'aux règles les plus simples pour s'élever davantage.<sup>35</sup>

Breaking the stereotype of female song as an attribute of beauty, Taunay makes her singer a musical genius whilst insisting on her physical unattractiveness: she is a precocious child caught between the 'genderless' innocence of childhood and the potential of the adult woman singer (which is an interesting take on the androgynous qualities implied by the concept of genius) and whose powerful voice only adds to her awkwardness, Floretta not only looks foreign to contemporary French tastes in beauty, but her perceived ugliness functions as a preliminary state to her bloom as a prima

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<sup>35</sup> *Une Cantatrice* (Paris: Berquet et Pétion, 1841), I, pp.5-6 (hereafter *Une Cantatrice*).

donna, whose voice and looks harmonize on stage but have no ground in real life. Even as an adult, the singer remains a far cry from ideal femininity. As such, Taunay's singer is devoid of the idealism of the stage persona but rather emphasizes the discrepancy between the 'genius' and professionalism that allows Floretta to perform sublimely on stage and to create the illusion of music and emotions through herself and the bland woman she is by day. This 'flaw' further prevents any romance between Floretta and Albert, the latter only expressing interest in the stage persona. In fact, the author clearly dissociates the musical experience from notions of female beauty and the visual rapture of the male spectator and thus consciously dismantles the visual, erotic aspect of the acclaimed singer as a contemporary fantasy. Nevertheless, Floretta's apprenticeship is as much a musical as an emotional one. While her revelation as a prima donna is at first motivated by her unrequited love for Albert, Floretta's growing disillusion with love goes hand in hand with her increasing artistic mastery. Not differentiating at first between her life and the stage, Floretta draws on her exaggerated, biased emotions in order to excel on stage, communicating her art in a credible and quasi-realistic way to the audience:

Il faut, disait-on pendant les entr'actes, qu'elle ait eu de fameux maîtres pour s'être rompue à exprimer de la sorte un sentiment si violent; ou qu'elle soit bien éprise, bien amoureuse de quelqu'un, reprenait un autre, car je doute qu'un cœur indifférent puisse peindre les passions avec ce haut degré de vérité.<sup>36</sup>

In an almost ironic nod to the stereotype of the female artist who ties herself to a male lover, Floretta acknowledges the problematic interdependence between her craft and her feelings for a man who continues to scoff at and reject her: 'Albert et le théâtre; dans ces deux mots se résume toute mon existence: l'un sans l'autre ne me suffirait pas: ma passion pour Albert est le secret de mon talent, et mon talent est le secret de ma passion pour Albert'.<sup>37</sup> Depicted as immoral and vulgar, Albert is anything but a Romantic protagonist but appears entirely unappreciative of Floretta's craft, leaving no

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<sup>36</sup> *Une Cantatrice.*, I, p.86.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p.327.



doubts about where he sees her, a public woman ‘engaged’ to her audience and whom he would never consider marrying:

Moi, comte de Fargueil, épouser une actrice, fille naturelle de M. Bonucci et de la Giovanina! ce serait trop plaisant en vérité, et cette nouvelle ferait, pendant un hiver au moins, le sujet de toutes les conversations en France et en Italie! Non, ma toute belle, quand on a votre talent on ne se marie pas; ce serait un vol manifeste. Vous vous devez au public, qui du reste vous rend en affection la considération qu’il est obligé de vous refuser.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the novel’s trivial tones and perhaps unwittingly comical, clichéd moments, the omission of any sentimental element in the love plot is noteworthy; Floretta’s art is a potentially empowering sign of genius and artistic procreation, yet she is also an object of social scrutiny and condescension and must come to terms with her status. If in other singer narratives, such as *Corinne*, at least the illusionary quality of song is upheld insofar as it is capable of uniting the lovers on a poetic level where they may temporarily take refuge from social norms, the focus for Floretta and Albert is decidedly different. Madame Taunay offers neither a utopian, symbolic space for the singer and her love-interest, nor the traditional female escape route of atonement for the singer who could theoretically marry into society if she renounced her artistic vocation. Rather, as in the case of Sand’s Gina or Fischer’s artist heroines, Floretta’s only possible path is one of self-appreciation and fully assuming her existence as an *artist* in reality, while discarding any illusionary, ‘romantic’ ideals about love and a place in society assumed to be the right one for her. Traditional constellations of art and love are further undermined when Floretta triumphs over her rival, the German prima donna Mlle Hermann who has become Albert’s mistress – however, the protagonist’s victory is purely artistic and serves to emphasize Floretta’s independence and position as prima donna in the true sense of the term and through a strict dissociation of art and love.

Thus the singer’s apprenticeship is one of professionalization: as a singer, she has to learn painfully to differentiate between her existence on stage and in real life as well as

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp.137-38. While the novel’s tone often appears ironic, Albert joins ranks with the male characters in my other case studies, who appear as rather weak, distorted Romantic protagonists.

between her art through which she catalyses her unrequited feelings for Albert, and the latter's *de facto* indifference – it is through this harsh apprenticeship that she gradually gains agency as a woman and as an artist while ridding herself of her emotional dependence on Albert:

On ne pouvait concevoir qu'une petite femme si grêle eût une voix semblable, et qu'un physique si ingrat à la ville changeât de la sorte sitôt qu'elle paraissait en scène. Floretta, dans sa vie privée, n'eût excité les désirs de personne, tandis que sous le costume de dona Anna, ou sous celui d'Inès, elle captivait tous les cœurs; il n'était pas jusqu'au léger Albert, qui, sans même le présumer, ne fût pris au piège; soit habitude, soit orgueil, il restait enchaîné, comme malgré lui, au char de la cantatrice en vogue, qu'il suivait en tous lieux, et dont il était devenu le véritable cavalier servant. Le salon de Floretta ne désemplissait point les jours où il n'y avait pas spectacle; Albert de Fargueil en faisait, pour ainsi dire, les honneurs, malgré les représentations de la comtesse, sa mère, qui, indignée de ce nouveau travers, lui disait durement: 'Il ne te manquait plus que de te faire entretenir par une actrice, au vu et su de tout le monde; personne n'ignore que c'est elle qui a payé tes dettes; veux-tu donc nous déshonorer sous tous les rapports?'<sup>39</sup>

Madame Taunay clearly draws on the stereotype of female beautification through song, yet decidedly contrasts the prima donna's illusion with Floretta's social stigma as an *actrice*, who is furthermore rather unattractive by the light of day. Thus, an essential part of Floretta's apprenticeship and liberation from her symbolic status as prima donna is her vocal and dramatic growth in so far as she not only expands her repertoire but moves out of her previous roles and beyond the vocal commonplace of opera. So far, Floretta has performed only roles that allowed her to transpose her personal state of mind and her feelings for Albert on to the stage and thus blur the boundaries of her personal life and her profession. Turning towards manlier, contralto roles, the singer's voice matures and expands with the result that Floretta's unattractiveness as a woman is transformed into the imposing beauty of the artist and her craft, a musically defined beauty which the singer owns.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp.130-31.



Son casque à panache blanc, ses beaux cheveux noirs retombant en boucles gracieuses autour de son visage, et le costume guerrier de Tancredi, avaient rendu Floretta belle, mais de cette beauté mâle qui étonne et subjugue: le feu magique de ses yeux, la fierté douce et noble de son maintien, l'air martial qu'elle avait su prendre, donnaient à toute sa personne quelque chose d'imposant, d'irrésistible; aussi la Bonucci fut-elle dès ce jour inscrite en lettres d'or dans le souvenir des *dilettanti* napolitains.<sup>40</sup>

In a second important step, the prima donna experiences further sublimity when she visits Rome and sings among the ancient ruins. While this key scene may have been inspired by Corinne's symbiotic rapport with Rome and its ruins, Madame Taunay uses Floretta's nightly, anonymous concert at the Coliseum as a scene to highlight the exceptional nature of the singing voice which ultimately appears as bodiless and sublime in its androgyny. In harmony with the poetic, religious nature of her surroundings, her singing voice acquires a new poetic depth since, for the first time, she sings without preconceived emotions and not for any audience but for her own pleasure as an artist. The poetic mise-en-scène of Floretta's performance and voice explicitly draws on the ideal of sublime song and enriches the singer's character not only as a stage performer, but as a transcended, sublimated ideal artist.

La jeune virtuose, sans se faire autrement prier, monta sur un fût de colonne, et chanta incontinent la cavatine de Tancredi, *Di tanti palpiti!* qui lui valut à Naples de si nombreuses couronnes. Ici, point de public à électriser, à subjuguer, point de rivale à confondre, rien qu'une inspiration à suivre, un ami à contenter, et pourtant Floretta fut sublime! Ses mâles accents eurent cette fois une puissance immense sur l'âme impressionnable de son compagnon. Ce fut presque de la souffrance. Jamais la cantatrice, dans ses plus beaux triomphes, ne lui avait paru si ravissante, jamais il n'avait senti davantage l'empire qu'elle exerçait sur lui. [...] Tous deux firent quelques pas pour s'éloigner, lorsque, en tournant une arcade, ils aperçurent leur *custode* et une certaine quantité de moines agenouillés près de là, paraissant écouter encore les sons qu'ils ne devaient plus entendre. – 'Ils ont raison d'en agir ainsi, s'écria l'Anglais, maîtrisé par son enthousiasme, en s'inclinant; c'est à deux genoux qu'il faut recueillir vos divins accents, trop heureux de trouver place à vos pieds, où toute la terre devrait se prosterner!<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp.165-66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp.226-27.

Floretta no longer performs in order to please Albert or the audience, nor is her song nourished by her extreme emotions, as was the case throughout the early stages of her career. Rather, her song now stems from her own inspiration and sublime gift, which makes her stand out as an exceptional singer able to transcend the conventional patterns of female song, a fact emphasized by the ‘masculinity’ of the performance through which she comes closer to the ideal of an androgynous, purist singing voice. Despite the knocks she inevitably receives as a working woman and artist, and amidst the rivalries and intrigues of her profession, Floretta displays a pronounced pride that is not confined to her singer persona but expands as part of an affirmative narrative discourse that emphasizes the overall acceptance of the character in the context of the novel. More than other texts of the time, Madame Taunay’s novel emphasizes a strong portrayal of the artist, and shows the singer’s realisation of her potential, her merit and musical genius:

Elle a pris, avec ses dix-neuf ans, le sentiment de ce qu’elle vaut et cette fierté native qui révèle aux femmes l’empire qu’elles sont appelées à exercer dans le monde. [...] elle a vécu dans le monde, elle y a été appréciée, recherchée, désirée, classée enfin parmi les femmes les plus remarquables de son temps. Il n’en est pas une sans doute qui se fut enorgueillie de semblables triomphes! Floretta, femme avant tout, quelle que soit d’ailleurs sa supériorité, a reconnu enfin son mérite.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the hardships of her career, Floretta, formulating a strong credo of independence, displays a distinct sense of autonomy and agency that inevitably replaces her child-like stubbornness about winning Albert’s heart with her song that shows a true sense of artistry and self-sufficiency. The singer’s claim for a space in the public arena naturally accompanies her auto-definition as an artist as well as her critical assessment of women’s place in society – an argument which bears some similarity to that of Fischer’s singer Justine, who criticized traditional gender codes as being to women’s disadvantage.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp.160-61.



Je n'ai rien de commun avec les autres femmes, et je suppose que cette divergence de mes opinions mondaines vient de ma première éducation. [...] votre sort, une fois lié à celui de l'autre, il vous faut (je parle des femmes) tout sacrifier aux convenances, à l'avenir présumé de vos enfants, à la volonté d'un mari quelquefois injuste, toujours despote. Si vous aimez le monde, il vous en éloigne; si vous avez des talents remarquables, il en prend ombrage, et vous réduit à oublier ce qui vous a coûté tant d'années d'études. Si c'est par état que vous cultivez l'art auquel vous êtes initiée, alors ce même homme, qui devait vous soutenir, vous encourager, devient le plus exigeant de vos critiques; [...] un tel état ne convient nullement à mon caractère indépendant, volontaire même, et qui, je le sens, ne se plierait jamais aux minuties du mariage. Enfant de la nature, je ne suis point habituée à suivre la volonté des autres; je n'ai supporté dans ma vie qu'un joug, celui de mon père; encore ne m'en a-t-il fait sentir la pesanteur qu'en ce qui avait rapport à la musique. Dans toute autre circonstance, j'étais, non seulement ma maîtresse, mais aussi celle de ma mère et de mon digne père lui-même.<sup>43</sup>

In a final digression from stereotype, Floretta experiences neither vocal breakdown nor physical demise, since her 'death' is effectively transposed onto her platonic friend Adenkton, whose suicide acts as a moment of liberation and catharsis for the singer. While other singers end their careers because of the requirements of love or because of their inability to resolve their conflicts as artists in society, Floretta's eventual decline appears as an almost banal vocal decline that occurs with age, disillusionment and increasing frustration with her professional milieu, and it starts at the height of her career, while she is perfectly in control of her voice and masters both technical and theatrical aspects of her roles. The fury and illusions in love of her youth have been replaced by mastery and maturity. If the prima donna's end may appear unspectacular to the point of being unromantic, she is in fact a realistic character who sustains herself to a high level and appropriates a musical genius which lasts. More importantly, Floretta incarnates a carefully crafted genius that no longer relies on the treacherous, extreme nature and interior instability of Romantic genius which celebrates the extreme of the suicidal, victimized artist. On the contrary, Floretta's sustainability depends on proper technique, focus, hard work, and above all female self-sufficiency: 'Maintenant tous les replis du cœur lui étaient familiers, et elle pouvait peindre avec une égale supériorité

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p.324.

l'amour soupçonneux ou l'amour satisfait. Plus maîtresse de son art, elle règle ses effets, et donne à son jeu une unité qu'il n'avait jamais eue jusqu'alors'.<sup>44</sup>

### Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *Domenica*

Among the writers of George Sand's generation, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859) seems to embody most fully the image of the Romantic woman artist who, echoing the fate of a writer like Fischer, experienced the hardship of reconciling her artistic ambitions with financial security and the more bourgeois role models of wife and mother. Propelled on to the stage at a young age, Marceline married the actor Prosper 'Valmore' Lanchantin and formed life-long friendships with well-known artists of her time, like the singer Caroline Branchu and the actress Mademoiselle Mars. Despite a lack of formal education, she was cultivated, with a discernible talent for the arts and for languages as well as pronounced social opinions.<sup>45</sup> Starting out as a recognized writer of poetry and *romances*, she published her first volume, *Élégies et romances* in 1819. Desbordes-Valmore produced over 2600 poems many of which were set to music by, among others, Georges Bizet and César Franck. Compared to most women authors of her generation, Desbordes-Valmore's life<sup>46</sup> and œuvre<sup>47</sup> have been relatively well documented and assessed, although certainly not to the same extent as George Sand's. Even though Desbordes-Valmore's status within the French literary canon is still somewhat undecided, scholars have now acknowledged her importance,

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<sup>44</sup> *Une Cantatrice*, II, p.33.

<sup>45</sup> See Christiane Elmer, 'Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859): un témoin engagé. La Dimension politico-sociale de Marceline'. Interview with Marc Bertrand (april 2006) <<http://www.desbordes-valmore.net/inter2.html>> [accessed 27 October 2008].

<sup>46</sup> See Francis Ambrière, *Le Siècle des Valmore: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore et les siens* (Paris: Seuil, 1987). The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig dedicated one volume to Marceline Desbordes-Valmore specifically: *Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. Das Lebensbild einer Dichterin. Mit Übertragungen von Gisela Etzel-Kühn* (Leipzig: Insel, 1920).

<sup>47</sup> See Wendy Nicholas Greenberg, *Uncanonical Women. Feminine Voice in French Poetry (1830-1871)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).



even coining the term *style marcelinien* in reference to her œuvre.<sup>48</sup> While Paul Verlaine declared her ‘la seule femme de génie et de talent de ce siècle et de tous les siècles’,<sup>49</sup> contemporary scholars<sup>50</sup> consider her an unorthodox woman poet with innovative, multi-faceted and unclassifiable aesthetics that make her stand out as a unique reflection of her time.<sup>51</sup> Less known than her poetry is her mature œuvre as a prose writer. Starting in 1830, Desbordes-Valmore authored a considerable number of *contes, nouvelles* and novels, some of which, including *Domenica*,<sup>52</sup> are available in modern critical editions.

*Domenica*<sup>53</sup> occupies a special place in Desbordes-Valmore’s œuvre, not only due to its musical-artistic theme which invites comparisons with the author’s own life, but also due to its status as a key text of French musical literature.<sup>54</sup>

### Synopsis

*The novella tells the story of the German painter Régis who, living a miserable life in Rome, comes to hear his neighbour, the young singer Domenica, with whom he falls instantly in love and to whose voice and fate he henceforth ties his entire existence. Thanks to Domenica’s German governess Fülle, Régis is able to follow the singer’s fate from a distance and relate it as a first-person narrator. A romantically platonic admirer from afar, the painter looks on helplessly as Domenica falls for her married colleague, the tenor Cataneo, while at the same time being pressured by her family to contract a rich marriage in order to solve their financial worries. After an audience with the Pope,*

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<sup>48</sup> During her lifetime, Desbordes-Valmore was in fact counted among the *grands poètes*, to whom amateurs and *ouvrier-poètes* sent their texts in the hope of securing a publishing deal (See Martin-Fugier, p.286).

<sup>49</sup> Paul Verlaine, *Œuvres en prose complètes* (Paris: Gallimard Pléiade, 1972), p.678.

<sup>50</sup> The leading Desbordes-Valmore scholar Marc Bertrand has provided important groundwork in the form of critical editions of her works as well as individual studies of her poetry. See *Louis Aragon et Marceline Desbordes-Valmore : essai de prosodie comparée* (Paris: Publications M.B. et G.T., 1997); *Les techniques de versification de Marceline Desbordes-Valmore* (Lille: Service de reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille III, 1981); *Les œuvres poétiques de Marceline Desbordes-Valmore* (Grenoble: PUG, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> See Christiane Elmer, ‘L’apport littéraire de Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. Marceline, reflet de son siècle’. Interview with Marc Bertrand (march 2006) <<http://www.desbordes-valmore.net/interl.html>> [accessed 27 October 2008].

<sup>52</sup> *Domenica*, ed. Marc Bertrand (Geneve: Droz, 1992) (hereafter *Domenica*).

<sup>53</sup> The novella was first published in the socialist journal *La Démocratie pacifique* (06.-17.11.1843).

<sup>54</sup> See Marc Bertrand’s preface to *Domenica* (pp.11-12).



*Domenica obtains a debt waiver for her family and goes on to live under papal protection in a Carmelite convent, where she continues to sing sacred music.*

As far as narrative development and staging of the prima donna persona are concerned, the novella remains indebted to the ideal of female song while taking the issue of artistic sublimity and female agency an important step further. A veteran of the song and *romance* genre, Desbordes-Valmore could have opted for a light treatment of her female singer, yet in fact she combines a profound poetic discussion of Domenica with a considered reflection on her singer as a socio-cultural creature. In consequence, Domenica, the divine child who develops into an acclaimed opera singer, appears both as a legitimate offspring of the earlier song models discussed in chapters 4 to 6, close to the symbolic and poetic quality of the female song, and as a child of her own time, in which the notion of the artist as a genius and demiurge is tied to her status as a performer and working woman in society. Domenica is a singer who, within the absolute realm of her musical gift, nevertheless undergoes important personal and professional changes as part of her formative journey to achieve artistic maturity and independence.

Drawing on elements of the artist novel and *Bildungsroman*, Desbordes-Valmore develops her singer through a tripartite plot, starting with Domenica's epiphany as a musician. The story of the singer's difficult upbringing and musical apprenticeship, which made her into the artist she is at the time depicted in the novella, is intertwined with the male narrator's radical, revelatory experience when he hears her for the first time. The narration starts *in medias res*, as Régis recounts his renaissance through Domenica's song:

Quand il m'arriva pour la première fois de m'écouter vivre et de me demander pourquoi je vivais, c'était à Rome, et je venais d'entendre Domenica chanter. Domenica n'existait que pour chanter, mais de ce chant qui éveille dans autrui toutes les facultés que la nature y renferme. L'écouter, c'était penser. Chaque élan de cette voix jeune et puissante détendait le bandeau qui me serrait le front. Durant ses études, l'unissait-elle à quelque instrument comme pour évoquer des amies qu'elle semblait regretter, on eût dit que ses doigts frêles y répandaient une haleine mélodieuse, et je ne respirais que de sa respiration. Cette enfant se reposait-elle des sons enchanteurs qui soulevaient l'Italie, l'air qu'elle venait d'ébranler s'immobilisait autour de moi; je me jetais hors de ma



chambre sans désirer même pénétrer dans la sienne, devant laquelle je passais, bourrelé d'un silencieux vertige, et je parcourais Rome comme un fou; mais le timbre argentin restait dans ma poitrine, où je l'entendais longtemps vibrer contre mon cœur. Ne pouvant suivre la chanteuse au ciel, en unissant ma voix inculte avec la sienne, je priais Dieu qu'il m'envoyât des ailes, afin de l'y retrouver un jour.<sup>55</sup>

Despite his distant and idealistic rapport with Domenica, Régis' role as a narrator and secret accomplice of the singer constitutes an important complement to the singer's vocal profile: 'Je ne pus desserrer les lèvres devant elle, car je me ressouvins tout-à-coup que je bégayais; et mon âme aussi se mit à bégayer en moi'.<sup>56</sup> Domenica's vocal sublimity is met with her male admirer's stuttering: he is never able to address her directly when they meet, but resorts to silence and to providing a written voice for the singer, much like Valterna in Sand's novella, or Hoffmann's narrators who remain outsiders to the true mystery of female song. Régis enjoys a somewhat undetermined, idealized status as both a distant onlooker and secret male accomplice who understands and respects the singer's genius and sublimity. Alienated from society, the painter identifies himself as part of Domenica's sphere, acting as her mirror and mouthpiece on the narrative level; in his attitude, Régis clearly differs from the stereotypical paradigm of the male painter and his female muse, such as in Fischer's *Margarethe*, a constellation which points towards the problematic link between feminine ideal and male artistic procreation.<sup>57</sup> More in line with Berlioz's 'weak' male characters, Régis lives an unsuccessful bohemian life with the sole purpose of hearing Domenica sing and cherishing the slightly more privileged relationship with her, without even forming the pretention to possess her. As the above excerpt shows, he reveals Domenica's musical genius in very clear terms, leaving no doubt about the unearthly gift and supreme status of this type of singer. Both 'natural' and intellectual (and thus to some extent both female and male) qualities are ascribed to Domenica, as well as the capacity to touch her listener in an unusual and deeply spiritual way, perpetuating her own voice within him.

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<sup>55</sup> *Domenica*, pp.17-18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>57</sup> See chapter 5.

Régis describes the impact of Domenica's song as an alteration of himself with a strong religious tone; her voice is 'complete' in that it serves both the sensual and intellectual side of music. Furthermore, it is her song that literally alters the air around her listener and breathes new life into him, continuing to reverberate close to his heart. This sublime and deeply spiritual experience gives Régis' life meaning, prompting him to question and to 'think'.<sup>58</sup>

Be that as it may, the deeply poetical quality of Domenica's song is informed by the singer's gruelling apprenticeship at the hands of her uncle Piramonti, who adopted the orphaned girl and trained her together with her cousin Ninio, a fellow child prodigy who is exhibited throughout Europe and who, after catching cold in England, dies prematurely. Domenica on the other hand survives Piramonti's cruel training, with the pain over her cousin's untimely death only adding to her musical gift, and she is revealed as a vocal genius in full bloom who captures her audience through the truth and intensity of her performance:

Dès le soir, le public ravi l'adopta pour son enfant. Elle était belle, la pauvre petite, intelligente, vive et trop folâtre pour ne pas éveiller la fréquente colère de son maître. Il n'était pas homme à s'endormir dans la préparation de ses plans futurs; aussi, les petits doigts qui, le matin, avaient été cruellement cinglés pour leur lenteur ou leur distraction au piano, agitaient doucement le soir un bouquet avec d'irrésistibles grâces devant un public idolâtre, qui donnait de l'or pour ses sourires et l'appelait: *La diva bambina*.<sup>59</sup>

Domenica radically differs from both her uncle who 'n'avait en lui rien de l'originalité piquante qui fait de tant d'honnêtes et laborieux comédiens l'une des classes les plus pittoresques de celles qui travaillent et souffrent',<sup>60</sup> nor does she share her late cousin's thirst for applause and fame: 'Outre une passion ardente pour l'étude, l'insatiable soif des éloges s'était emparé du petit Orphée'.<sup>61</sup> Literally pushed on stage at a young age, Domenica starts singing with no particular intention to please, and her

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<sup>58</sup> In her famous artist novel *Song of the Lark* (1915), Willa Cather describes the completeness and absolute nature of her singer as follows: 'The voice simply is the mind and is the heart. It can't go wrong in interpretation because it has in it the thing that makes all interpretations' (*The Song of the Lark*, ed. A. S. Byatt (London: Virago, 1982), p.509).

<sup>59</sup> *Domenica*, p.25.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.



child-like ‘purity’ and innocence, ‘cette voix si brillante sortant d’une bouche si petite et innocente’ are what single her out as a sublime child with an exceptional gift who is able to surpass her cousin later on, thanks to a strict education and the painful emotions and memory of his passing: ‘La voix seule de Domenica surpassa bientôt en puissance celle de son frère, parce que déjà cette voix était pleine de douloureux souvenirs’.<sup>62</sup> Growing up, Domenica maintains the child-like disposition displayed in her very first performance, during which the public declared her a *diva bambina*; Domenica’s uniqueness is emphasized through the hybrid, transgressive qualities of both the diva and the child, reconciling the myth of the god-like child with the ideals of music and poetry (which were constructed more polemically by Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*) and with the artistic agency of the mature adult singer, such as proposed by Sand and Taunay. Domenica’s ‘beauty’ is an exclusively musical and sublime trait, marked by its completeness in moral, intellectual, sensual and artistic terms and which makes the singer immune to any form of mundanity or trivialization. Desbordes-Valmore further develops Domenica in this particular aesthetic in the key scene of the singer’s debut and artistic emergence at the San Carlo theatre in Naples:

Tout-à-coup son adolescence éclata comme une rose blanche qui sort de ses épines. En dépit des privations et d’un étroit confinement, elle s’éleva droite, souple et pure comme les vestales qui ne s’endorment pas en veillant les lampes éternelles. Ses cheveux et ses yeux étaient si noirs, la coupe de son visage si parfaitement italienne, que son maître crut pouvoir l’annoncer partout comme native de Sorrente, bien qu’une simple chaumière anglaise eût servi de crèche à cette enfant de tribu errante. La quinzième année de Domenica sonnait quand elle apparut au théâtre de San Carlo, à Naples, sous le voile blanc de Giulietta, et son début fut couronné d’un succès immense. Sa voix était splendide et d’une suavité rare. Spontini, qu’elle enleva hors de sa place durant un de ses voyages en Italie, ne trouva rien de comparable à cette voix bondissante, hormis la voix divine de Mme Branchu, qui, disait-il n’eut jamais de rivale au monde pour son égalité parfaite dans ses trois octaves, son élégante flexibilité, sa tristesse pleine de larmes, et sa brûlante énergie. Il définissait devant moi cet instrument humain, si doux et si passionné, en disant qu’il était à la fois l’orage et l’oiseau. Domenica possédait de même, à son insu, la poésie profonde qui traduit par le souffle toutes les passions murmurantes d’une âme complète qui s’étonne, qui s’ignore, et livre au ciel avec de saints transports la confiance de ses douleurs. Quoique timide et renfermé, l’habitude l’avait familiarisé de bonne heure à plaider, si l’on peut hasarder ce mot, devant des juges ravis et fiers de lui faire gagner sa cause. Aussi n’était-ce que

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.



devant eux qu'elle réapparut pleine de confiance et d'abandon. Ses formes sveltes, sa distinction naturelle, avaient leur part sans doute, dans les transports que causait sa jeune présence; mais c'était ce souffle tout-à-tour léger, solennel, plaintif et toujours chaste comme son cœur qui fit pleuvoir sur elle les rubans, les sonnets et les fleurs dont la jeune fille surprise demeura presque suffoquée.<sup>63</sup>

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore carefully balances her singer's visual aspects with her vocal characteristics, insisting on the 'souffle' rather than on melodious or performative aspects of a particular song. The emphasis lies on the underlying features of her voice that are not directly visible or audible, but which denote a deeper, more spiritual quality, that sought-after 'poésie profonde' which underpins musical idealism and the Rousseauesque concept of song, yet which appeared incommunicable for early archetypes like Mignon and Corinne and continued to impede artistic empowerment for women singers in general. The narration pays homage to the orphic power of the singer's voice, echoing the musical ideal by allegorizing her as the perfect 'human instrument'; pure, harmonious and perfectly communicating, translating this specific poetry of the interior through her voice and providing the listener with a deeper understanding of life through art – in turn, the singer is given space and full credit as a priestess of music who literally breathes her gift into her listeners. On the other hand, she retains the fragility of a girl thrown into the spotlight and who appears to be 'suffocated' by the public showering affections on her. An unusual prima donna, Domenica reunites the two antagonistic sides of female musicality in that she is a strong stage persona in the guise of a saintly 'muse enfermée',<sup>64</sup> a 'jeune sainte Cécile'.<sup>65</sup> She leads no typical prima donna lifestyle, but shies away from all worldly aspects associated with singers, instead opting for seclusion, discipline and focusing on fulfilling the tasks set by Piramonti and giving outstanding performances. The girl remains unscathed by the dire circumstances of her upbringing but rises above them, unimpressed by the possibilities of her career and the prima donna image she could be expected to live up to.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.



Elle vivait, pure comme la flamme allumée, chaque soir, pour elle à la Madone, par la foi d'une pauvre femme du peuple. Peut-être cette pudeur sauvage ou elle rentre quand ses belles lèvres se ferment lui a-t-elle été soufflée tandis que sa poitrine d'enfant servait d'oreiller à Ninio mourant, et que ce souffle plaintif lui a dit: 'Domenica, prends garde! c'est le dernier concert qui m'a tué!<sup>66</sup>

Despite her child-like saintliness, Domenica is not immune to some of the major problems commonly associated with female singers, such as financial worries and the question of whether or not to give in to one of the many suitors and potential patrons – or even worse, to betray her exclusive gift by falling in love and tying her craft to emotional dependence. Yet as is the case with most singers mentioned so far, Domenica's vocal genius, nourished by her artistic and personal integrity, is rendered fragile through her association with men, namely the ill-doomed infatuation she develops for Cataneo and the pressure she is exposed to by Piramonti's continued greed and exploitation. If the idealist Domenica nourishes the illusion that Cataneo would be her ideal partner (which is true on stage and in terms of her own artistic evolution), Régis critically exposes the tenor as an unsuitable match:

La taille de ce rossignol humain était petite et lourde, sans grâce et sans souplesse, son visage terne et piqué de la petite vérole. [...] Depuis un an, [Domenica] avait épuré son goût sur le sien, l'écoutant de l'âme et du regard. Je m'avouai, pour lors, la différence sensible de son expression, quand ces deux voix fraternelles s'emportaient d'un même essor dans les chefs-d'œuvre de l'homme régnant aujourd'hui par toute l'Europe.<sup>67</sup>

Although not depicted as morally corrupt or dangerous, Cataneo cannot return Domenica's feelings, since he is married to an unnamed singer who left him for a love affair with a foreign prince. The tenor's confession and the subsequent destruction of her illusions trigger a severe crisis in Domenica whose final nervous breakdown occurs during a recital with her colleague which turns into a duel between performers. While the saintly Domenica appears instantly more human through her emotional suffering,

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.32-33.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.41-42. The composer in question is Rossini.

the combination of her vocal distress with her personal state of mind in fact accentuates her surreal allure, which is exclusively channeled through her voice.

Qui l'eût peinte alors eût éternisé une belle chose! Il eût gardée l'image de l'artiste accomplie, créée pour écouter avec amour, comme pour chanter avec religion et foi. Plus tard, dans la soirée, tandis que les sons ravissants de ces deux voix erraient dans toute la salle s'élevant, s'abaissant ensemble tout-à-tour comme deux rossignols qui luttent; alors que tous, sans respirer, leur tendaient une oreille ravie, hélas! Hors moi, vaincu et entraîné là par mon cœur, qui pouvait se douter de l'angoisse enfermée dans le sein harmonieux de la pauvre sirène!<sup>68</sup>

As a direct expression of Domenica's inner self, her voice surpasses the normal range of tessitura and the capacity of the singer's body and literally explodes, like George Sand's singer whose death coincided with a blatant mismatch of body and voice, and whose idealistic song transcended the normal categories of music and gender. While this larger-than-life performance causes the public's frenzy, it also leads to Domenica's breaking-point: her song collapses in the form of screams, while she herself plummets into madness. Too strong to be contained, Domenica's inner state of mind destroys her harmony, leading to the climactic, albeit symbolic, death of the singer and her idealisms. In this key scene, Domenica's voice is no longer sustained by her sublime 'souffle' but is depicted as a direct (imaginative or real) scream from the singer's breaking heart, alienating her from herself and her audience:

L'expression de sa voix, d'abord vague et resserrée, devint large et puissante; ses cris furent sublimes; on pleurait, on la couvrait de fleurs. Ses bras s'ouvrirent, et le bouquet tomba, dont la vue parut l'effrayer. L'air, interrompu par une note aiguë de la flûte, et le roulement réel du tonnerre, firent qu'elle se recula, regardant avec alarme autour d'elle. Puis, les sons adoucis de cette flûte, appelant la rentrée du chant, séparèrent ses lèvres, mais nulle voix n'en sortit plus. Un seul cri perçant lui partit du cœur, et, posant sa main sur ce cœur qui éclatait, Domenica resta immobile. La confusion se répandit de loge en loge. Chacun s'avavançait avec inquiétude; chacun attendait celle qui devenait étrangère à tout. 'Ne paraissant plus se ressouvenir du lieu où elle était, isolée sous les milliers d'yeux qui la regardaient avec anxiété, elle plia doucement les genoux comme une personne en prière, séparant une par une les fleurs du bouquet, et s'efforçant de les attacher dans le vide, ainsi qu'elle avait fait au portrait de sa mère. – C'est le rôle! C'est

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.



le rôle! crièrent plusieurs voix. – Non! Emmenez-la! Emmenez-la! crièrent d'autres, plus fort'.<sup>69</sup>

This striking narrative caesura at which the singer's vocal death occurs takes us back to the Rousseauesque core of human vocality and emotivity, situated within the heart, as is musical genius. In stark contrast to the image of the consummate, professional performer, as seen in Balzac's or Berlioz's texts, *Domenica* merges the personal and the professional, nature and art. However, this delicate status does not result in the singer's death, as was the case with Sand's *Gina*. *Domenica* in fact recovers from her psychological distress and, while doing so, transforms into a saintly figure who is deeply admired for her purity and innocence:

Un ange! Un ange! dit le vieux prêtre en passant entre nous deux. L'aube en ce moment éclairait un peu nos figures. – Qu'avez-vous à pleurer? mes frères, poursuivit-il en nous exhortant. Ici, ou plus haut, c'est vraiment un ange. N'ayez donc pas moins de soumission qu'elle.<sup>70</sup>

Cataneo furthermore elevates her above the constraints of common society by stylising her as a saint-like figure against whom he believes he has sinned: 'Elle est à l'abri de tous, cria [Cataneo] avec une joie déchirante. Vous ne pouvez la déshonorer, maintenant. Priez pour moi, jeune vierge, ajouta-t-il d'une voix que brisaient les sanglots, et pardonnez-moi!'<sup>71</sup>

The denouement *Desbordes-Valmore* provides is no 'happy ending' in the way one might expect it – the prima donna's stage career is cut short and she retreats behind the walls of the Carmelite Convent. However, it is not a dramatic ending either as was the case in certain other cases where the singer's poetic, symbolic death resulted in her actual physical death. Rather, by radically removing her singer from the constraints of the prima donna image and sanctifying her (which again suggests a symbolic death of the singer's female body), *Desbordes-Valmore* suggests a freedom for her singer who

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

from the start was portrayed as saintly and pure, a survivor in a treacherous environment. Domenica was trained for public performances yet it is questionable whether she actually enjoyed this career, since Piramonti trained her in order to further his own personal and financial objectives. The novel concludes with an enigmatic, open end, leaving the last words to the singer herself who, liberated from all social and emotional attachments, is able to voice her thoughts directly: 'Eh que fera-t-elle de sa voix? demanda Fülle avec un sanglot. – Si la voix n'est pas morte, je chanterai les louanges de Notre-Dame-du-Carmel, répondit simplement Domenica. Ce fut vrai le lendemain'.<sup>72</sup>

Despite ending her novel somewhat abruptly, Desbordes-Valmore manages to show a previously unknown facet of the singer, providing a contrast to more common conceptions of the prima donna and maintaining the delicate balance between song poetics and the performative side of the singer. Régis describes the singer as a rather sad and deplorable character, a 'pauvre Prima Donna'<sup>73</sup> who, just before she becomes entangled in standard prima donna worries, financial issues and love conflicts, so often depicted in more traditional singer stories, is able to profit from her breakdown and draw back from an environment that is depicted as illusory, corrupted and malevolent. The Pope's protection constitutes an 'acte de délivrance [...] qui changeait sa destinée errante et les pompes théâtrales en une claustration volontaire'.<sup>74</sup> Through her withdrawal, which to a certain extent echoes Margarethe's withdrawal from the muse position into the security and autonomy of the convent, Domenica obtains not only agency, but a voice that concludes the novel. While this may to some extent be regarded as symbolic, it makes Domenica stand out as a singer who breaks free from the singing model imposed on her by others and evolves towards personal maturity and an exclusive sense of freedom, despite the certainly 'open' ending. For the narrator's part, he believes that, free of all worldly constraints, 'Domenica est devenue heureuse',<sup>75</sup> and that in her particular situation, the convent is able to offer a personal freedom and

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.92-93.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.



agency that had so far been lacking in her life as a singer. However, a certain doubt remains with regard to the ambiguity of Domenica's status as an 'angelic' creature who retreats behind the walls of the convent in order to escape the burden of her prima donna existence. It seems as though Desbordes-Valmore deliberately chose an open ending in order to bypass the insoluble conflict of the woman singer between ideals of musical femininity and the fantasy and worldly dimension of the stage performer.

As we have seen, the literary treatment of the motif by women authors constitutes a vital aesthetic and socio-cultural complement to the many reflections on the increasingly visible woman artist in French culture of the 1830s and 1840s. The female-authored texts selected for this chapter develop and rewrite the singer, reappraising her as a complex figure of female artistry through whom they reflect on the key *topoi* of female song ideals, between stereotypical depictions of the musical feminine and enactments of genuine female artistic empowerment in society. Sand, Taunay and Desbordes-Valmore mostly avoid traditional poses of victim or muse and neglect the trivia of the bourgeois would-be artist, but appear keen to investigate the singer critically in terms of her artistic legitimacy and performance space, as well as her emancipation from the superficiality of both the prima donna fantasy and the traditional paradigms associated with female song that we saw earlier. Thus, authors of the July Monarchy period continue to negotiate the claim for a female *artist* reconciled to both the idealistic side of music and the pragmatic demands of her vocation and her efforts to integrate herself into society as a fully-acclaimed artist, moving away from the ideal realm of muse, dilettante or prostitute. Within a female writing tradition, these claims were voiced before by writers such as Sophie Mereau, Caroline Fischer and Madame de Staël, yet it is in the texts of the later writers discussed in this chapter that they find a stronger, more realist narrative voice as well as a more prominent narrative space. However, the discussion in this chapter has also shown how far it is problematic to apply a binary reading to a motif like the singer according to the author's sex, since both male-authored texts, such as the ones discussed in chapter 6, and female-authored

texts negotiate equally the fine line between the stereotype and the potential of female song, with moments of striking artistic agency occurring regardless of the author's sex.



## Conclusion

Going back to Goethe's initial remark on Mignon, whom he described as having the 'madness of disparity',<sup>1</sup> it seems to me that this peculiar expression captures the essence of the woman singer and her song very well: As with most artist figures who occur throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is something highly enigmatic, extreme, perhaps even mad about the singer, who appears as such a strong, yet fragile character full of the contradictions that mark contemporary discourse on woman and art and who, as woman *and* artist, is difficult to place within an aesthetic and socio-cultural framework. There remains something ineffable about even the most visible, acclaimed prima donna, who is always marked to some extent as a 'stranger',<sup>2</sup> to use Desbordes-Valmore's term. Bound to the unspeakable sublime of music as well as to the fluid, shifting and controversial views on femininity and art, the enigmatic essence of singer and song described by authors seems to go beyond the boundaries of contemporary cultural and theoretical discourse, creating a literary vision of female song and performer that is unique and modern. Considering Goethe's remark, there is furthermore a strong sense of disproportion and discrepancy about the singer, which marks the character as profoundly different yet potentially powerful, implying a questioning of the rapport between aestheticized concepts such as song and femininity and its very realistic embodiment by a female performer.

In my thesis, I have set out to investigate the motif of singer and song in literary texts, setting my discussion against the background of the socio-cultural and aesthetic discourse, outlined in chapters 2 and 3. My central question addressed individual authors' treatment of the dichotomy that I identified as inherent to the imagery of female song, namely the discrepancy between a musical-feminine ideal

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<sup>1</sup> 'Wahnsinn des Mißverhältnisses' (*HA VII*, p.616).

<sup>2</sup> 'Celle qui devenait étrangère à tout' (*Domenica*, p.80).

and song as a possibility for female performance and agency. I have investigated how this dual vision of 'musical femininity' as both a socio-cultural and an aesthetic phenomenon was transposed into literature, and how literary texts responded to the notion of musical-feminine otherness implied by the iconic paradigms of female song that contemporary aesthetics suggested.

What I have shown in my discussion of the various case studies is that not only did authors respond strongly to the image of the singer (as part of a general fascination with music and song), but that in their literary treatment of the motif, they exceeded the simplifying, restrictive patterns of contemporary culture and theory, and discussed various implications of female song in nuanced, multi-layered ways, which sometimes resulted in their making surprisingly strong cases for female song. The broad development of the motif, from the early archetype of Mignon to the consummate, ultra-professional *Domenica* shows above all that the authors I have discussed in this study were certainly indebted to musical aesthetics and to certain ideals associated with woman and song – such as the implication of musical-feminine otherness. Yet all of them developed their interpretation of such paradigms, a uniqueness developing both on the thematic level, in other words the authors' textual development of singer and song, and, on the narrative level, through the authors' extension of the motif within the narrative discourse. Thus, the different narratives offer an alternative, more complex and subversive treatment of the singer and her song. Thematically, the singer in literature is developed much further than contemporary ideals of the musical feminine, with authors creating figures of singers that exceed the clichés of female musicality and limiting categories such as dilettante, prima donna, muse or songbird, and actually crafting very carefully a female *artist* figure who appears exceptional in her otherness. Furthermore, the initially idealist view of music, song and femininity which determines earlier musical narratives around 1800 becomes increasingly tempered by a very realist perspective on musical-poetic transcendence and the necessity to reconcile the sublime realm of music with the banal, prosaic framework of performance. This shift of song aesthetics between idealism and realism coincides with the transition from the more idealist aesthetics of German narratives before and after 1800 towards works of French Romanticism and Realism, which treated the singer from a different



socio-cultural and aesthetic perspective. Yet despite the chronological and cultural discrepancy, seemingly disparate narratives like Goethe's *Meister* and Desbordes-Valmore's *Domenica* still draw on the same fascination with music and the enigmatic nature of the singer as a 'stranger', physically, textually, musically.

Apart from the simplified, schematic treatment of singer and song implied by contemporary aesthetics, I have furthermore, in chapters 2 and 3, established contemporary discourse as a paradox around notions of the musical-feminine, which had been a trademark in the discussion of female artistry since antiquity, and which continued to encourage the rewriting of the woman singer as a figure of female and musical difference and abnormality. Although the authors discussed do not radically reverse the paradigm of female otherness, they develop the issue in a much more assertive way, thus opening up a possible reading of female artistic empowerment through difference, while simultaneously inscribing the woman singer in a tradition of artistic genius, i.e. artistic originality and supremacy – an exceptional status normally reserved for the male artist throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The authors discussed do not simply rewrite or reproduce schematic imagery of singer and song, as contemporary aesthetics might lead us to suspect, nor do the narratives dwell on clichés like the singer's viscosity or eroticism. Rather, the narratives critically investigate the singer's otherness as the potential for female expression and autonomy, to the point of sometimes outright refusing the stereotypical pose of the singer, for instance in Fischer's view, but also in Madame de Taunay's and Desbordes-Valmore's depiction of the singer as a hard-working, self-reflecting professional.

All the case studies discussed here share the fact that their authors did not merely reproduce socio-cultural and aesthetic commonplaces with which readers were familiar but that, united in their fascination with the singer and her song, and their unique treatment of the female singing voice and body, they contributed to an ongoing, fluid and controversial discourse on woman and music which undermines the simplistic and dogmatic aspects of cultural and aesthetic paradigms.

Certain key themes that developed out of my case studies are particularly important with regard to contemporary ideals of song:

A central issue regarding the woman singer is her shifting status between a musical ideal and the professional reality of female art in practice. Authors increasingly blended their treatment of singer and song with a discussion of female artistic education. As a result the fantasy of female song becomes much more entrenched in realist imagery, to the detriment of the static, iconic image of female song as a fixed ideal. The narrative treatment of female song moves away from a purely idealist imagery to an attainable element of female professional artistry, stripping the singer of a great part of illusion and fantasy, while anchoring her much more within a social frame and a community of artists and artistic kinship. Although the singer's realism is to some extent at odds with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ideal of artistic genius (a fate shared by male artists), it certainly places the singer, thematically and textually, within the broader literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman* and the artist novel, which are both marked by the protagonist's having to come to terms with the unliveable ideal of art and its realistic implications. This increasing sense of realism and measure requires especially an iconic, idealized character like the singer to be situated within a nuanced, literary discussion of female artistry, paving the way towards agency of the artistic self, and thus, prefiguring aesthetics of modernity.

Secondly, an important area of the narrative treatment of the singer concerns her problematic status within society, caught between the concept of aestheticized femininity and biological femaleness, as well as the underlying ideology opposing (female) nature to (male) art. This double-bind of the woman singer results in her rather unstable position outside social norms which, despite offering an important sense of freedom as well as artistic exceptionality, also marks her as a 'faulty' female and a marginalized creature. The crucial issue of this challenge to the dogma of biological femaleness is addressed by Madame de Staël and George Sand who both develop the theme of symbolic motherhood and female artistic sisterhood and lineage, which serves as a substitute for conventional models of womanhood. The woman artist's symbolic family and the necessity of establishing a female artistic tradition appear as key topics especially within a female writing tradition (and rightfully identify Madame de Staël as an influential foremother of 19<sup>th</sup>-century women authors).

The third key issue which emerged from my discussion of the different case



studies is the question of narrative performance space, and thus, the issue of the singer's space, literally and textually. This vital point is pertinently taken up by all the authors, in the important, general questioning of the singer's legitimacy as artist and woman, and constitutes the most important shift from the socio-cultural and aesthetic background to the literary development of the motif. What emerged from the theoretical backdrop to female song was especially the visuality and the sensuality of the singer, as an object of sublime eroticism and fantasy projected onto the singing body by a (male) spectator, and standing in sharp contrast to the otherwise ethereal, sublimated nature of song and music.

Literature responds to this dichotomy in an extremely striking way by debating the issue of space on different levels, weighing up the sensual fascination and the static pose of the songbird with a narrative discourse on the singer and her quest for a voice, literally and poetically. Goethe and Staël are the two authors who, writing during a specific period of aesthetic transition and fluidity, most prominently discuss their singer's semiotic space, by hybridizing their texts and creating a textual blend between the singer, her communication and the narrative environment; this space that the singer occupies thus becomes clearly visible in the prose text. Yet as we move on towards more realist depictions of singer and song, the debate on narrative space persists.

Looking at the last case study, *Domenica*, there is something mesmerizing about the way the author creates and dramatizes her prima donna as a fantasy, first brought to life through the viewpoint of the male admirer Régis, and who seems aptly to fit into the mould of the acclaimed yet static and visualized singer who, as a narrative subject, remains strangely mute. In short, Desbordes-Valmore draws on the visual, sensual fantasy of the woman singer, only to have Domenica 'come to life' properly and free herself from the prima donna myth in the very last lines of the novel and, by speaking properly for the first time, claim agency for herself, discarding the image that was created of her hitherto in the novel. I found that such a debate on the singer's narrative voice is shared by the different case studies, and undermines the central fantasy of female song aesthetics which ultimately confined the singer to the pose of a visual, eroticized songbird to be looked at, not a lyrical subject in charge of her identity and her song. In this respect, all the texts discussed offer interesting

escape routes, despite the fact that they obviously have to draw both on the auditory and the visual aspect of the woman singer. What they accomplish is that they undermine the fantasy of the static visual singer, and of female song imagery by conceptualizing the singer within a narrative discourse, with the possibility of the singer owning this discourse.

I have shown that through a critical close reading of the singer as a narrative discourse, we find that many authors create alternative spaces for the singer, away from static, clichéd song paradigms. These alternative narrative spaces range from the ineffable of Mignon's proto-linguistic songs to the overly confessional tone of Taunay's Floretta, a proper *Bildungsroman* heroine, who consciously dismantles the fantasy of her own illusion by giving a detailed account of her life, her struggles and her emancipation from illusory song clichés. Some of these alternative spaces for the singer to escape pre-conceived song aesthetics are developed more radically, as in Fischer's polemics of song and ideal femininity, in which her heroines discard the feminine ideal and, by doing so, obtain a proper, narrative voice. Other authors like Hoffmann, Balzac and Berlioz seem to conform at first glance to more traditional song imagery and their texts require a very close, critical reading in order to identify spaces of personal and artistic freedom and integrity for the singer who, contrary to traditional readings, in fact represents a positive potential. Berlioz is perhaps the author of the later generation of Romantics who most of all contrasts the static ideal of Romantic song, fantasized about by the male onlooker, with the singer's quest for an alternative voice, and her continuous search for autonomy and the resulting, inevitable dismantling of the singing muse.

Having identified these key issues in the literary treatment of the woman singer, I conclude that the authors discussed in my thesis not merely drew upon contemporary, stereotypical imagery associated with female song, but significantly rewrote and undermined a simplified view of singer and song through a careful narrative construction of the character and her communication, beyond iconic, one-dimensional song imagery. However, although I identified such tendencies in both canonical and non-canonical works, it has also become evident that not all the authors succeeded equally well in inscribing their texts in the literary discourse. This problem seems to affect the female authors more than the male authors. Although I



deliberately chose to discuss each case study on the basis of its individual merit in writing the woman singer, discovering important potential for female song in both male- and female-authored works, it has become obvious that the women authors, more than the men, argued the case for the professional woman artist, and treated the discrepancy between the ideal of musical femininity and the quest of the female artist for self-expression and autonomy more directly.

Therefore, it is crucial to discuss carefully and critically the singer and her song in prose fiction of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While it seems initially enticing to read the motif along simplistic lines of thought suggested by contemporary aesthetics, it is in fact part of a more complex, literary discourse, marked by a fluidity which seems to fit well with that ineffable, enigmatic essence of the singer herself.

What I infer from my research is that a critical reading of an iconic motif such as female song significantly contributes to a reassessment of the woman artist in literature, who so strongly reflected large-scale developments of female artistry in society and aesthetics, yet who loses nothing of the controversy and polemics associated with professional female musicality. The motif of the woman singer is by no means confined to the case studies I chose for this thesis – although they constitute some of the most fascinating and relevant cases for a discussion of female song. I was naturally limited in the number of authors discussed, so there is further scope for research into the period covered by my thesis, which could imply a reassessment of canonical authors in France and Germany as well as a widening of the literary discussion to non-canonical authors. I hope to have set an example for a new reading of 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts treating an iconic motif like the singer, through my comparativist reading and interdisciplinary approach to the topic. My example could be equally fruitful for an investigation of both the evolution of the motif in the post-Romantic era, and the singer transgressing national and generic boundaries across European literatures.

## Bibliography

For abbreviations in reference to journal titles, see the list of abbreviations, pp.vii-viii.

The edition cited in the bibliography is the one used for quotations and references throughout the thesis. Where I have not used the first edition of a work, I indicate in square brackets at the end of the entry the date of the original work.

### 1. CORPUS OF MAIN PRIMARY TEXTS

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